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DANGEROUS CORNER

Produced at the Lyric Theatre, London, on May 17th, 1932, with the following cast of characters:

(In the order of their appearance)

FREDA CAPLAN	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Marie Ney.
MISS MOCKRIDGE	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Esmé Church.
BETTY WHITEHOUSE	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Isla Bevan.
OLWEN PEEL	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Flora Robson.
CHARLES STANTON	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Frank Allenby
GORDON WHITEHOUSE	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	William Fox.
ROBERT CAPLAN	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Richard Bird.

The Play produced by TYRONE GUTHRIE.

SCENE

The Drawing-room of the Caplans' House at Chantbury Close. After Dinner.

TIME.—The Present.

The action of the Play is continuous.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

I should like to call the attention of prospective producers of this play to the alternative version of the beginning and end, to be found on pages 68-76. This was written for the American producers, who did not care for the wireless play effect in the original version. Perhaps it is neither so plausible nor so amusing as the original beginning, but it is simpler to produce, less confusing, and allows a few minutes' dialogue before the black-out and the shot.

J. B. P.

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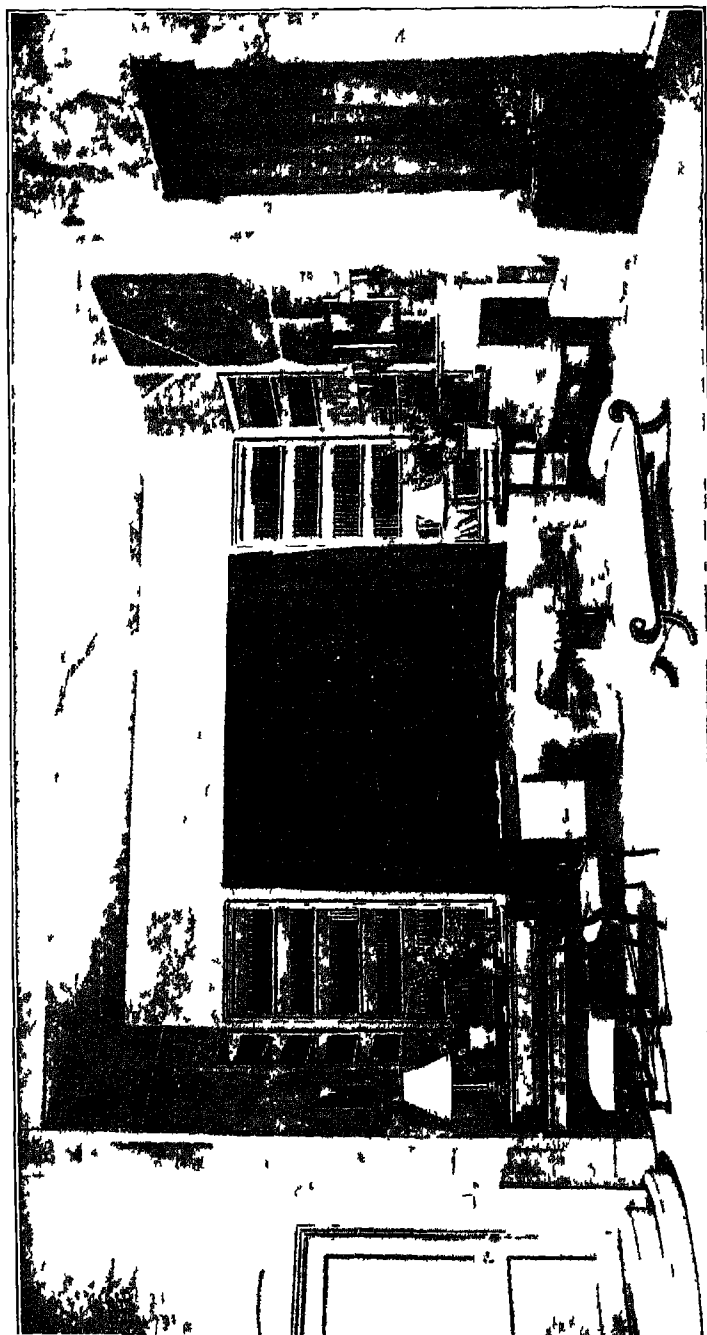
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DANGEROUS CORNER

ACT I*

The Drawing-room of the CAPLANS' House at Chantbury Close. It is after dinner.

(For details, see Photograph of Scene, also Furniture and Property Plot at the end of the play.)

The CURTAIN rises on the stage in darkness. There is a sound of a revolver shot, somewhat muffled, followed by a woman's scream. After a small interval of silence, FREDA says, with a touch of irony, "There!" and switches on the lights at the mantelpiece, where she remains standing for a minute or two.

OLWEN is discovered sitting in the armchair below the fireplace. L. BETTY is sitting on the settee down C. MISS MOCKRIDGE is in the armchair, R.C., smoking a cigarette from a long cigarette-holder.

FREDA CAPLAN is in her late twenties or early thirties, rather tall and fair. She is very smart and self-possessed, superficially rather hard, but capable of showing signs of deep emotion.

OLWEN PEEL is about the same age as FREDA, dark, not so smart, but quite trim. She has a pleasant open manner, but is just a trifle aloof.

BETTY WHITEHOUSE, in her early twenties, is very pretty, preferably rather small, and a decided blonde. She should be dressed to emphasize her youthfulness. Petulant, kittenish, in lighter scenes, and shrill and hysterical in the emotional passages.

MISS MOCKRIDGE, between forty-five and fifty, is a heavy, sophisticated woman, well-dressed. She has an authoritative manner and a speculative eye.

They are all in evening dress, and have obviously been listening to the wireless—on the table up R.—and waiting for the men to join them. FREDA starts to move across to switch off the set when the wireless announcer, speaking in the accents of his kind, begins:

ANNOUNCER. You have just been listening to a play in eight scenes, specially written for Broadcasting, by Mr. Humphrey Stoat, called "The Sleeping Dog."

FREDA (crossing slowly to the radio set). And that's that. I hope it didn't bore you, Miss Mockridge?

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Not in the least.

* See Author's Note on page 4.

BETTY. I don't like the plays and the stuffy talks. I like the dance music, and so does Gordon.

FREDA (*switching off the radio*). Dance fiends! You know, Miss Mockridge, every time my brother Gordon comes here, he annoys us by fiddling about trying to get dance music. (*She comes down and switches on the lamp on the piano.*)

BETTY. I adore switching off the solemn pompous lecturers—just extinguishing them.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. What did they call that play?

OLWEN. "The Sleeping Dog."

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Why the "sleeping" dog?

BETTY. Because you had to let him lie.

FREDA. Let who lie? (*She takes a cigarette from the box on the piano, then crosses behind MISS MOCKRIDGE'S chair to the table c.*)

BETTY. Well, they were all telling lies, weren't they? Or they had been.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. How many scenes did we miss?

OLWEN. Five, I think.

(*FREDA lights her cigarette from a match on the table.*)

MISS MOCKRIDGE. I suppose they must have been telling a lot of lies in those scenes. That's why that man was so angry—the husband, I mean.

BETTY. But which was the husband? Was it the one with the adenoid voice?

MISS MOCKRIDGE (*briskly*). Yes; the one with the adenoid voice: and he went and shot himself. Very pathetic, I'm sure.

FREDA. Rather too many adenoids. (*She sits on L. arm of the armchair L.C.*)

MISS MOCKRIDGE. They're rather pathetic, too.

(*They laugh, and then there comes a subdued burst of laughter from the men in the dining-room, somewhere off R.*)

BETTY. Listen to the men.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. They're probably laughing at something very improper.

BETTY. No, just gossip. Men gossip like anything.

FREDA. Of course they do.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Quite right. People who don't like gossip aren't interested in their fellow creatures. I insist upon my publishers gossiping.

BETTY. Yes, but the men pretend it's business.

FREDA. They've got a marvellous excuse now that they're all three directors of the firm.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Yes, of course. Miss Peel, I think you ought to marry Mr. Stanton.

OLWEN. Oh, why should I?

MISS MOCKRIDGE. To complete the pattern here. Then there'd

be three pairs of adoring husbands and wives. I was thinking so all through dinner.

FREDA. There you are, Olwen.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. I'm almost prepared to marry Charles Stanton myself to be one of your charmed circle. What a snug little group you are.

FREDA. Are we?

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Well, aren't you?

FREDA (*with a laugh, rising*). Snug little group. (*Moving over to the piano.*) How awful!

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Not awful at all. I think it's charming.

FREDA (*smiling*). It sounds disgusting.

BETTY. Yes. Like Dickens or a Christmas card.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. And very nice things to be. In these days almost too good to be true.

FREDA (*apparently amused*). Oh, why should it be?

OLWEN. I didn't know you were such a pessimist, Miss Mockridge.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Didn't you? Then you don't read the reviews of my books—and you ought to, you know, being an employee of my publishers. I shall complain of that to my three directors when they come in. (*She gives a slight laugh.*) Certainly I'm a pessimist. But I didn't mean it that way, of course. I think it's wonderful.

FREDA. It is rather nice here. We've been lucky.

OLWEN. Enchanting. I hate to leave it. (*To Miss Mockridge.*) You know, I'm in the town office now—not down here at the press—but I come back as often as I can.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. I'm sure you do. It must be so comforting to be all so settled.

BETTY. Pretty good.

MISS MOCKRIDGE (*to Freda*). But I suppose you all miss your brother-in-law. He used to be down here with you too, didn't he?

FREDA (*embarrassed, turning to Miss Mockridge*). You mean Robert's brother, Martin.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Yes, Martin Caplan. I was in America at the time, and never quite understood what happened. Something rather dreadful, wasn't it?

(*There is a pause, and Betty and Olwen look at Freda. Miss Mockridge looks from one to the other.*)

Oh, have I dropped a brick? I always am dropping bricks.

FREDA (*sitting on the piano-stool, and speaking very quietly*). No, not at all. It was distressing for us at the time, but it's all right now. Martin shot himself. It happened nearly a year ago—last June, in fact—not here, but at Fallows End, about twenty miles away. He'd taken a cottage there.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Oh yes—dreadful business, of course. I only

met him twice, I think. I remember I thought him very amusing and charming. He was very handsome, wasn't he?

(CHARLES STANTON and GORDON WHITEHOUSE come in R. STANTON is about forty, dark, with a small moustache. He has a deep voice and a manner that is rather harsh and authoritative. GORDON, about twenty-four or twenty-five, is fairly tall, slight and good-looking. He has an indolent, graceful, Oxford-ish manner in lighter scenes, but with frequent suggestions of underlying hysteria. Both men wear well-cut dinner-jackets.)

OLWEN. Yes, very handsome.

(STANTON crosses below the settee and takes up a position in front of the fireplace. GORDON goes to the settee, sits at R. end with his back to the audience, and takes BETTY's hand.)

STANTON (with jovial condescension). Who's very handsome?

FREDA. Not you, Charles.

STANTON. May we know, or is it some grand secret between you?

GORDON. They were talking about me. Betty, why do you allow them all to talk about your husband in this fulsome fashion? Have you no shame, girl?

(Everybody talks ad lib. here, until the entrance of ROBERT.)

STANTON. How's the new novel going?

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Splendidly, thanks.

STANTON. Is it as naughty as the last?

MISS MOCKRIDGE. I'm afraid it is.

BETTY (squeezing his hand). Darling, I'm sure you've had too much manly gossip and old brandy. You're beginning to look purple in the face and bloated—a typical financier.

(GORDON kisses her hand.)

(ROBERT CAPLAN comes in R., switching on the light at the doorway as he enters. He is between thirty and thirty-five, of medium height and build, clean-shaven, with a pleasant smile. He must be able to suggest honest bewilderment without seeming too stupid. He wears a well-cut dinner-jacket.)

ROBERT. Sorry to be so late, Freda—but it's that wretched puppy of yours.

FREDA. Oh, what's it been doing now?

ROBERT (moving to R. of, and a little below, MISS MOCKRIDGE's chair). It was eating the script of Sonia William's new novel, and I thought it might make him sick.

BETTY. Oh, the darling.

OLWEN. How—

ROBERT. You see, Miss Mockridge, how we talk of you novelists.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Yes, I heard you. I've just been saying what a charming cosy little group you've made here, all of you.

ROBERT. I'm glad you think so.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. I think you've all been lucky.

ROBERT. I agree, we have.

STANTON. It's not all luck, Miss Mockridge. You see, we all happen to be nice easy-going people.

ROBERT. Except Betty—she's terribly wild.

STANTON. That's only because Gordon doesn't beat her often enough—yet.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. You see, Miss Peel, Mr. Stanton is still the cynical bachelor—I'm afraid he rather spoils the picture.

STANTON. Miss Peel can't afford to talk—she's transferred herself to the London office and deserted us. *(He strolls down L. and picks up a glass-case puzzle which is lying on the table. He then sits on the downstage arm of OLWEN's chair and tries to work it, rolling the ball about.)*

OLWEN. I come back here as often as I'm asked.

GORDON *(rising, moving up to the radio and playfully turning ROBERT round as he passes him)*. But whether it's to see me or Robert, we can't yet decide. Anyhow, our wives are getting jealous.

BETTY *(laughing)*. Oh, frightfully.

GORDON *(beginning to fiddle with the wireless)*. What's disturbing the ether to-night? Anybody know?

ROBERT. I'll find something for you. *(He picks up the "Radio Times" from the piano and begins to look through it.)*

FREDA. Oh, Gordon, don't start it again. We've only just turned it off.

GORDON. What did you hear?

FREDA. The last half of a play.

OLWEN. It was called "The Sleeping Dog."

STANTON *(without looking up from his puzzle)*. Why?

MISS MOCKRIDGE. We're not sure—something to do with lies, and a gentleman shooting himself.

STANTON *(still without looking up)*. What fun they have at the B.B.C.

FREDA. Yes, don't they? Shots and things.

OLWEN *(rising and moving up to the armchair L.C.)*. You know, I believe I understand that play now. The sleeping dog was the truth, do you see, and that man—the husband—insisted upon disturbing it. *(She sits on the L. arm.)*

ROBERT. He was quite right to disturb it. *(He turns to the piano, puts down the "Radio Times," then takes a cigarette and lights it.)*

STANTON *(looking up)*. Was he, I wonder. I think it a very sound idea—the truth as a sleeping dog.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Of course, we do spend too much of our time telling lies and acting them.

BETTY. Oh, but one has to. I'm always fibbing. I do it all day long.

GORDON (*still fiddling with the wireless*). You do, darling, you do.

BETTY. It's the secret of my charm.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Very likely. But we meant something much more serious.

ROBERT (*moving to R. end of settee and sitting, facing up stage*). Serious or not, I'm all for it coming out. It's healthy.

STANTON (*rising, drifting down to table L. and leaning back against it*). I think telling the truth is about as healthy as skidding round a corner at sixty. (*He still holds the puzzle.*)

FREDA. And life's got a lot of dangerous corners—hasn't it, Charles?

STANTON. It can have—if you don't choose your route well. (*Leaning over towards OLWEN.*) To lie or not to lie—what do you think, Olwen? You're looking terribly wise.

OLWEN. I agree with you. I think telling everything is dangerous. The point is, I think—there's truth and truth.

GORDON (*turning*). I always agree to that. (*Leaning against the piano.*) Something and something.

STANTON. Shut up, Gordon. Go on, Olwen.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Yes—go on.

OLWEN (*thoughtfully*). Well—the real truth—that is, every single little thing, with nothing missing at all, wouldn't be dangerous. I suppose that's God's truth. But what most people mean by truth, what that man meant in the wireless play, is only half the real truth. It doesn't tell you all that went on inside everybody. It simply gives you a lot of facts that happened to have been hidden away and were perhaps a lot better hidden away. It's rather treacherous stuff.

GORDON. Yes, like the muck they drag out of everybody in the law courts. "Where were you on the night of the twenty-seventh of November last? Answer yes or no."

MISS MOCKRIDGE. I'm not convinced, Miss Peel. I'm ready to welcome what you call half the truth—the facts.

ROBERT (*with one foot upon the settee, tying his shoelace*). So am I. I'm all for it.

FREDA (*enigmatically*). You would be, Robert.

ROBERT. What do you mean by that, Freda?

FREDA (*nonchalantly*). Anything; nothing. (*Rising and going to the drink table up R.*) Let's talk about something more amusing. Who wants a drink? Drinks, Robert. And cigarettes.

ROBERT (*rising and examining cigarette-box on table C.*). There aren't any here. (*He crosses to the piano and is about to take up cigarette-box from there.*)

FREDA. There are some in this one. (*She takes the musical cigarette-box from the table up R., being careful to keep it closed, and*

moves down between Miss Mockridge and Olwen.) Miss Mockridge, Olwen—a cigarette? (*Offering the closed box to them.*)

OLWEN (*looking at the box*). Oh, I remember that box. (*Rising.*) It plays a tune at you, doesn't it? I remember the tune. Yes, it's the Wedding March, isn't it? (*She opens the box, taking a cigarette, and the box plays.*)

ROBERT. Good, isn't it?

FREDA (*snapping the box shut*). It can't have been this box you remember. This is the first time I've had it out. It belonged to—someone else.

OLWEN. It belonged to Martin, didn't it? He showed it to me.

(*GORDON moves down to below Miss Mockridge as Martin's name is mentioned. There is a tiny silence. The two women look at each other steadily.*)

FREDA. He couldn't have shown it to you, Olwen. He hadn't got it when you saw him last.

STANTON. How do you know he hadn't got it, Freda?

FREDA. That doesn't matter. I do know. Martin couldn't have shown you this box, Olwen.

OLWEN. Couldn't he? (*She looks at Freda significantly for a second, then makes a quick change of manner.*) No, perhaps he couldn't. I suppose I got mixed up. I must have seen a box like this somewhere else, and then pushed it on to poor Martin because he was always so fond of things like this.

(*FREDA moves away up c. GORDON moves back to the piano and looks at the "Radio Times."*)

ROBERT (*moving slightly in*). Olwen, I'm going to be rather rude, but I know you won't mind. You know *you* suddenly stopped telling the truth *then*, didn't you? You're absolutely positive that this is the box Martin showed you, just as Freda is equally positive it isn't.

(*GORDON puts down the "Radio Times" and turns to the wireless again.*)

OLWEN. Well, does that matter? (*She moves to the table up L., then comes back again to behind the armchair L.C., facing front.*)

GORDON (*fiddling with the wireless*). Not a hoot. I'm trying to find some dance music, but this thing has suddenly decided not to function.

ROBERT (*moving up to GORDON with irritation*). Then don't fiddle about with it.

BETTY. Don't bully Gordon.

ROBERT. Well, you stop him. (*Moving down again.*) No, I don't suppose it does matter, Olwen, but after what we'd been saying, I couldn't help thinking that it was rather an odd, provoking situation.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Just what I was thinking. It's all terribly provoking. More about the cigarette-box, please.

FREDA (*moving down between the armchairs*). It's all perfectly simple—

OLWEN (*quickly, going to L. of FREDA*). Wait a minute, please, Freda. I don't think it is all perfectly simple, but I can't see that it matters now.

FREDA. I don't understand you.

ROBERT (*lightly, moving to below R. end of settee and putting one knee on it*). Neither do I. First you say that it can't have been the same box, and now you say it's not all perfectly simple and begin to hint at grand mysteries.

(OLWEN *moves away to the fireplace.*)

I believe you're hiding something, Olwen, and that isn't like you. Either that box you saw was Martin's, or it wasn't—

STANTON. Oh, damn the box! (*He crosses below the settee to the piano-stool, taking the puzzle with him.*)

(OLWEN *lights her cigarette at the mantelpiece, then sits in the arm-chair L.*)

BETTY

MISS MOCKRIDGE } (*together*). { Oh, but, Charles—we'd like to hear—

But, Mr. Stanton—

STANTON (*sitting*). Sorry—but I hate a box that plays tunes at you like that, anyway. Let's forget it.

GORDON (*with a sudden touch of bitterness, turning slightly up stage*). Yes, and Martin, too. He's not here—and we are, all warm and cosy—(*turning back*)—such a charming group.

ROBERT (*going up to GORDON and nudging him*). Shut up, Gordon.

GORDON. Don't let's mention Martin or think about him. Bad form. He's dead. (*He moves up stage again.*)

FREDA. Well, there's no need to be hysterical about it, Gordon. One would think you owned Martin, to hear you talk. (*She crosses R. and puts the musical-box back on the table.*)

BETTY. Instead of which, nobody owned Martin. He belonged to himself. He'd some sense.

ROBERT (*R. of MISS MOCKRIDGE*). What does all that mean, Betty?

BETTY (*with a laugh*). It means that I'm being rather stupid and that you're all talking a lot of rot, and I think I'm going to have a headache any minute.

ROBERT. Is that all?

(GORDON *drifts over to the fireplace.*)

BETTY. Isn't that quite enough?

ROBERT (*turning to FREDA*). Go on, Freda.

FREDA (*crossing to armchair L.O.*). I wish you wouldn't be so absurdly persistent, Robert. But it's quite simple about the cigarette-box. It came to us with some other of Martin's things from the cottage. I put it away, and this is the first time it's been out here. (*She sits in the armchair.*) Now the last time Olwen was at the Fallows End cottage, was that Saturday when we all went over—you remember, at the very beginning of June.

GORDON (*dreamily, sitting on the stool in front of the fireplace*). Gosh—yes! What a day that was. And a marvellous night, wasn't it? That was the time when we all sat out in the garden for hours, and Martin told us all about those ridiculous people he'd stayed with in Cornwall—the handwoven people——

(ROBERT moves up stage during this.)

BETTY. Yes—and the long, thin woman who always said "Do you belong?"

GORDON (*with sudden feeling*). I don't think I ever had had a better day. We'll never have another like that.

ROBERT (*in the window*). Yes, it was a good day. Though I'd no idea you'd been so excited about it, Gordon.

FREDA. Neither had anybody else. Gordon seems to have decided that he ought to be hysterical every time Martin is mentioned.

BETTY. I suspect it's Robert's old brandy. And those enormous glasses. They go to his head.

GORDON. Well, where do you want them to go to?

ROBERT (*to FREDA, moving down to small chair below L. of the piano*). The point is, then, that that first Saturday in June was the last time Olwen was at Martin's cottage——

FREDA. Yes; and I know that he hadn't got this cigarette-box then.

ROBERT. No, he'd have shown it to us if he'd had it then. As a matter of fact, I never remember seeing the thing at the cottage. So there you are, Olwen. (*He sits down in the chair.*)

OLWEN (*with an uncertain smile*). There I am.

ROBERT (*rising again*). Yes, but—hang it all—where are you?

OLWEN (*smiling at him*). You are a baby, Robert. I don't know where I am. Out of the dock or the witness-box, I hope. (*She turns away, looking into the fireplace.*)

(BETTY, who has been thinking, rises, goes to the table C. for a chocolate, then moves back to R. end of the settee and sits, facing OLWEN.)

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Oh no, please. That would be too disappointing.

BETTY. You know, that *wasn't* the last time you were at the cottage, Olwen. Don't you remember, you and I ran over the next Sunday afternoon, to see Martin about those little etchings?

OLWEN. Yes.

ROBERT. Yes, that's true.

BETTY. But I don't remember him showing us this cigarette-box. In fact, I've never seen it before. (*She sits at L. end of the settee with her feet up.*)

STANTON. I've never seen it before, and I don't think I ever want to see it again. I never heard such a lot of fuss about nothing.

FREDA (*to STANTON*). I wouldn't be too sure about that, Charles. But I may as well tell you—if only to have done with it—that Martin couldn't have shown you the box that Sunday anyhow, because he hadn't got it then.

STANTON. You seem to know a lot about that box, Freda?

GORDON. That's just what I was going to say. Why are you so grand and knowing about it?

BETTY (*pointing, triumphantly*). I know why. You gave it to him.

(*All eyes focus on FREDA.*)

ROBERT. Did you, Freda?

FREDA. Yes, I gave it to him.

ROBERT (*rising*). That's queer. I don't mean it's queer your giving him the cigarette-box—why shouldn't you? But it's queer your never mentioning it. When did you give it to him? Where did you pick it up? (*He makes a slight movement towards C.*)

FREDA. That's all quite simple, too. You remember the day before that awful Saturday. You were staying up in town, and I came up for the day. Well, I happened to see the cigarette-box at Calthrop's. It was amusing and rather cheap, so I bought it for Martin.

ROBERT. And Calthrop's sent it to Martin, down at Fallows End, so that he never got it until that last Saturday? (*He sits in the chair again.*)

FREDA. Yes.

ROBERT. Well, that's that.

GORDON. I'm sorry, Freda, but it's not quite so simple as all that.

(*FREDA guiltily turns her head round to him.*)

You mustn't forget that I was with Martin at the cottage that very Saturday morning.

ROBERT. Well, what about it?

GORDON. Well, I was there when the parcel post came, with the letters, in the morning. I remember Martin had a parcel of books from Jack Brookfield—I don't forget anything about that morning, and neither would you if you'd been dragged into that hellish inquest as I was. But he didn't have that cigarette-box.

FREDA. I suppose it must have arrived by the afternoon post, then. What does it matter?

GORDON. It doesn't matter at all, Freda darling, except that at Fallows End parcels are never delivered by the afternoon post.

FREDA. Yes they are.

GORDON (*nodding his head*). No.

FREDA. How do you know?

GORDON. Because Martin used to grumble about it and say that he always got books and manuscripts a day late. That cigarette-box didn't arrive in the morning, because I saw the post opened, and it couldn't have been delivered in the afternoon. Freda, I don't believe those shop people in town ever *sent* the box. You *took* it to Martin yourself. You did, didn't you?

FREDA. You are a fool, Gordon.

GORDON. Possibly. But remember, I didn't start all this. You did take it to Martin, didn't you?

ROBERT (*leaning forward*). Did you?

FREDA (*hastily composing herself*). Well, if you must know—I did.

ROBERT (*rising*). Freda!

GORDON. I thought so.

ROBERT (*amazed*). But, Freda, if you went to the cottage to give Martin the box after Gordon had left, you must have seen Martin later than anybody, only a few hours before he—before he shot himself.

FREDA. I did. I saw him between tea and dinner.

ROBERT. But why have you never said anything about it? Why didn't you come forward at the inquest? You could have given evidence.

FREDA. I could, but why should I? What good would it have done? It was bad enough Gordon having to do it—

GORDON. It was hell!

FREDA. If it could have helped Martin, I'd have gone. But it couldn't have helped anybody.

STANTON. That's true. You were quite right.

ROBERT (*moving across to R. of FREDA's chair*). Yes, I can understand that. But why didn't you tell *me*? Why did you keep it to yourself? Why have you kept it to yourself all this time? You were the very last person to talk to Martin.

FREDA. Was I the last person?

ROBERT. You must have been.

FREDA. Then what about Olwen?

ROBERT. Olwen— (*He looks across at the cigarette-box.*) Oh—the cigarette-box.

FREDA. Yes, of course—the cigarette-box. Martin didn't get that box until after tea on that Saturday afternoon, and Olwen admitted that he showed it to her.

BETTY. No, she didn't. She said it was some other box, and I vote we believe her and have done with it.

Mrs. MOCKRIDGE. No. No, Mrs. Whitehouse—

BETTY. Yes, I do. It's all wrong going on and on like this.

STANTON. And I second that.

ROBERT (*moving down and crossing to chair below L. of the piano, patting BETTY as he passes*). And I don't.

BETTY. Oh, but Robert—

ROBERT. I'm sorry, Betty—though, after all, you don't come into this and it can't hurt you. But Martin was my brother, and I don't like all these mysteries, and I've a right to know. (*He sits in the chair.*)

OLWEN. All right, Robert. But must you know now?

FREDA. I don't see the necessity. But then I didn't see the necessity why I should have been cross-examined, with the entire approval of the company apparently. But now that it's your turn, Olwen, I've no doubt that Robert will relent.

ROBERT. I don't see why you should say that, Freda.

OLWEN. I'm sure you don't, Robert.

ROBERT (*to STANTON, referring to the puzzle*). Can you do that, Charles?

(*STANTON shakes his head.*)

FREDA. You might as well admit it, Olwen. Martin showed you that box, didn't he? So you must have seen him; you must have been to the cottage that Saturday night.

OLWEN. Yes, he did show me the box. That was after dinner—about nine o'clock—on that Saturday night.

ROBERT (*rising and moving down level with the end of the settee*). You were there too? But this is crazy. First Freda—then you. And neither of you has said a word about it.

OLWEN. I'm sorry, Robert. I just couldn't.

ROBERT. But what were you doing there?

OLWEN. I'd been worried about—something—something that I'd heard—it had been worrying me for days, and at last I couldn't stand it any longer. I felt I had to see Martin to ask him about it. (*At the mention of MARTIN's name, GORDON shows irritability.*) So I ran over to Fallows End. I had some dinner on the way, and got to the cottage just before nine. Nobody saw me go and nobody saw me leave—you know how quiet it was there. Like Freda, I thought it wouldn't serve any good purpose to come forward at the inquest—so I didn't. That's all.

ROBERT (*crossing to OLWEN and facing her*). But you can't dismiss it like that. You must have been the very last person to talk to Martin. You must know something about it.

OLWEN (*wearily*). It's all over and done with. Let's leave it alone. Please, Robert. (*Rising with a change of manner and moving up to L. of FREDA's chair.*) Besides, I'm sure we must be boring Miss Mockridge with all this stuff.

MISS MOCKRIDGE (*briskly*). Oh no, I'm enjoying it—very much.

OLWEN. We don't mean to discuss it, do we, Freda? There's nothing to discuss. All over. (*She sits on the arm of FREDA's chair.*)

ROBERT (*who has been brooding*). But look here, Olwen, you must tell me this. Had your visit to Martin that night anything to do with the firm? You say you'd been worried about something.

FREDA. Oh, Robert, please.

ROBERT. I'm sorry, but I must know this. Was that *something* to do with that missing five hundred pounds?

GORDON (*rising and speaking very excitedly*). Oh—for God's sake—don't drag that money into it. We don't want all that all over again. Martin's gone. Leave him alone, can't you, and shut up about the rotten money.

(*OLWEN rises, moves up to the window-seat and sits at R. end.*)

FREDA. Gordon, be quiet. You're behaving like an hysterical child to-night. (*To Miss MOCKRIDGE.*) I'm so sorry.

GORDON (*mumbling*). Oh, so am I. I beg your pardon, Miss Mockridge. (*He moves up to L. of the window.*)

MISS MOCKRIDGE (*rising*). Not at all. But I think—if you don't mind—it must be getting late.

FREDA (*rising*). Oh, no.

ROBERT. It's early yet.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. The Pattersons said they'd send their car over for me to take me back. Has it arrived yet, do you know?

(*BETTY rises and moves to R. of and below Miss MOCKRIDGE.*)

ROBERT (*crossing R. to the door*). Yes, I heard it arrive when we left the dining-room, and I told the man to wait in the kitchen. I'll get hold of him for you.

(*He goes out. FREDA moves to above C. of the settee.*)

FREDA (*aware of the irony of this*). Oh, must you really go?

(*GORDON comes down to the armchair L.C. OLWEN rises and drifts down to STANTON, watching him trying to do his puzzle.*)

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Yes, I really think I ought. It's at least half an hour's run to the Pattersons', and I don't suppose they like their car and chauffeur to be kept out too late. (*Shaking hands with FREDA.*) Thank you so much. (*She shakes hands with OLWEN.*)

(*STANTON rises and crosses to below FREDA, just L. of her.*)

It's been so delightful seeing you all again—such a charming group you make here. (*She shakes hands with BETTY.*) Good-bye, Mrs. Whitehouse. Good-bye. (*She shakes hands with STANTON.*)

FREDA (*crossing to the door, followed by Miss MOCKRIDGE*). I think you left your wrap in my room. I'll get it for you.

MISS MOCKRIDGE (*at the door*). Good-bye.

ALL. Good-bye.

FREDA (*going out*). I hear that you had a very good time in America . . .

(Both women exit and the door is shut.)

(OLWEN crosses and looks at the books on the shelves up L. BETTY moves up to the bay of the piano and takes a cigarette. STANTON, after a sigh of relief, goes up R. and pours out a drink.)

GORDON *(crossing to the piano)*. For this relief, much thanks.
(He takes a cigarette, which BETTY offers him, lights BETTY's and then his own.)

BETTY. Good Lord—yes. I'm sorry, but I can't bear that woman. She reminds me too much of a geometry mistress we used to have at Lordsdale.

STANTON. I've always suspected your geometry, Betty.

BETTY *(patting GORDON's face after he has lit her cigarette)*. Thanks, darling. *(She crosses to the stool in front of the fireplace and sits.)*

STANTON. Drink, Gordon?

GORDON. No, thanks. *(He crosses to the settee and sprawls on it, his head at L.)*

STANTON. It's very rum—but nevertheless, she's not at all a bad novelist. I don't mean she's just a good seller, but she's a goodish novelist too. Why is it there seems to be always something rather unpleasant about good novelists?

GORDON. I give it up. But I don't call Maud Mockridge a good novelist, Stanton.

BETTY. I bet she's a gossip.

STANTON. She is. She's notorious for it. *(Crossing to the arm-chair L. and sitting.)* That's why they ought to have shut up. She'll embroider that cigarette-box story and have it all round London within a week. The Pattersons will have it to-night, to begin with. It must have been agony for her to go away and not hear any more.

GORDON. She wouldn't have gone if she'd thought she'd have heard any more. But she's got something to be going on with. *(With a chuckle.)* She'll probably start a new novel in the morning and we'll all be in it.

BETTY. Well, she'll have to use her imagination a bit about me.

STANTON. And me. Perhaps she'll invent the most frightful vices for us, Betty.

BETTY *(with a laugh)*. She can't really do much with what she's just heard, you know. After all, why shouldn't Freda have taken Martin a cigarette-box, and why shouldn't Olwen have gone to see him?

(OLWEN is looking at a book which she has taken from one of the shelves.)

OLWEN *(idly)*. Yes, why not?

BETTY. Oh—I'd forgotten you were there, Olwen. Can I ask

you something? After all, I don't think I've asked anybody anything, so far, have I?

OLWEN. You can ask. I don't promise to answer.

BETTY. I'll risk it then. Were you in love with Martin, Olwen?

OLWEN (*steadily*). Not in the least.

BETTY. I thought you weren't.

OLWEN. As a matter of fact, to be absolutely candid, I rather disliked him.

(GORDON rises as he hears this.)

BETTY. Yes, I thought so.

GORDON (*moving up to R. of OLWEN*). Oh—rot! I'll never believe that, Olwen. You *couldn't* dislike Martin. Nobody could. I don't mean he hadn't any faults or anything; but with him they just didn't matter. He was one of those people. You had to like him. He was Martin.

BETTY. In other words—your god. You know, Gordon literally adored him. Didn't you, darling?

STANTON. Well, he could be fascinating. And he was certainly very clever. I must admit the firm's never been the same without him.

GORDON (*moving to the table down L.*). I should think not. (*He sits on the table.*)

BETTY (*mockingly*). How could it be?

(*Enter ROBERT, followed by FREDa. He goes to the table up R. and pours out a drink. FREDa moves to front of the piano, takes a cigarette from the box, then sits on the piano-stool.*)

(OLWEN puts the book back.)

ROBERT. Now we can thrash this out.

OLWEN (*crossing to R.C.*). Oh no, please, Robert.

ROBERT (*turning*). I'm sorry, Olwen. But I want to know the truth now. There's something very queer about all this. First Freda going to see Martin, and never saying a word about it. And then you going to see him too, Olwen, and never saying a word about it either. It's not good enough. You've both been hiding this all along. You may be hiding other things too.

(OLWEN moves away up stage and sits at R. end of the window-seat.)

It seems to me it's about time some of us began telling the truth—for a change.

FREDa. Do you always tell the truth, Robert?

ROBERT. I try to.

STANTON (*with irony, taking a cigarette from his own case*). Noble fellow. (*He rises and goes up to above the armchair L.C.*) But don't expect too much of us ordinary mortals. Spare our weaknesses.

FREDa. What weaknesses? (*She rises, crosses to above table C., and lights her cigarette there.*)

STANTON (*shrugging his shoulders*). Anything you like, my dear Freda. Buying musical cigarette-boxes, for instance. I'm sure that's a weakness.

FREDA (*to STANTON, significantly*). Or making rather too much use of one's little country cottage. I think that too, in certain circumstances, might be described as a weakness.

STANTON. Do you mean Martin's cottage? I hardly ever went there.

FREDA. No, I wasn't thinking of Martin's. I must have been thinking of another one—perhaps your own.

STANTON (*looking at her steadily*). I'm afraid I don't understand.

(FREDA moves to the armchair R.C. and sits.)

ROBERT (*moving to L. of the window*). Look here, what's all this about? Are you starting now, Stanton?

STANTON (*with a laugh*). Certainly not.

ROBERT. Well, I want to get to the bottom of this Martin business. And I want to do it now.

GORDON. Oh Lord, is this going to be another inquest? (*He sits down in the armchair L., dangling his legs over the arm.*)

ROBERT. Well, it wouldn't be necessary if we'd heard more of the truth, perhaps, when there was an inquest. (*Going to OLWEN.*) And it's up to you, Olwen. You were the last to see Martin. Why did you go to see him like that? Was it about the missing money?

OLWEN. Yes, it was.

ROBERT (*sitting L. of OLWEN*). Did you know then that Martin had taken it?

OLWEN. No.

ROBERT. But you thought he had?

OLWEN. I thought there was a possibility he had.

GORDON (*bitterly*). You were all damned ready to think that.

BETTY. Gordon, I want to go home now.

ROBERT (*rising*). So soon, Betty? (*He moves down c.*)

BETTY. I'm going to have an awful headache if I stay any longer. I'm going home—to bed. (*She rises and moves down to GORDON.*)

GORDON. All right. Just a minute.

STANTON. I'll take you along, Betty, if Gordon wants to stay on.

BETTY. No, I want Gordon to come along too.

GORDON. All right. (*Rising.*) I'll come along. But hang on a minute.

BETTY (*with a sudden hysterical scream*). I tell you I want to go now. Take me home. (*She crosses to c.*)

ROBERT (*going close to her*). Why, what's the matter, Betty?

BETTY. I don't know. I'm stupid, I suppose. (*She moves R.*)

GORDON. All right. We'll go. (*He follows her.*)

(FREDA rises and moves over to the piano.)

STANTON. I'll come along too. (*He moves to c.*)

ROBERT (*below BETTY*). But, Betty, I'm awfully sorry if all this stuff has upset you. I know it's nothing to do with you, anyhow——

BETTY (*pushing him aside and running to the door*). Oh, don't go on and on about it. Why can't you leave things alone?

(*She rushes out and slams the door.*)

GORDON (*below steps, turning*). Well, good night, everybody.

(*He goes out.*)

(*FREDA moves up to R. of window. STANTON crosses R.*)

STANTON (*on top step, turning*). I'll see these infants home and then turn in myself.

OLWEN (*with irony*). Very good of you. (*She rises.*)

STANTON. Yes, isn't it? Good night.

(*He exits.*)

(*OLWEN crosses to the fireplace and sits on the top end of the stool.*

ROBERT looks after them, switches out the light at doorway, then the piano-lamp. He then crosses quickly to the armchair L.C. and sits on the arm facing OLWEN.

FREDA is standing up stage, R. of the window.)

ROBERT. And now, Olwen, you can tell me exactly why you rushed to see Martin like that about the missing money.

OLWEN. We're all being truthful now, are we?

ROBERT. I want to be.

OLWEN. What about you, Freda?

FREDA (*crossing slowly behind ROBERT's chair to between them*). Yes, yes, yes, I don't care. What does it matter?

ROBERT (*looking up at her*). Queer way of putting it.

FREDA. Is it? (*She moves slowly down to the armchair L.*) Well sometimes, Robert, I'm rather a queer woman. You'd hardly know me. (*She sits.*)

OLWEN. You started all this, you know, Robert. Now it's your turn. Will you be truthful with me?

ROBERT. Good God! Yes—of course I will. I loathe all these silly mysteries. But it's not my turn. I asked you a question that you haven't answered yet.

OLWEN. I know you have. But I'm going to ask you one before I do answer yours. I've been wanting to do it for some time, but I've never had the chance or never dared. Now I don't care. It might as well come out. Robert—did you take that money?

ROBERT (*amazed*). Did I take the money?

OLWEN. Yes.

ROBERT. Of course not. You must be crazy, Olwen.

(*OLWEN gives a laugh of great relief, and drops her head in her hands.*)

Do you think, even if I had taken it, I'd have let poor Martin shoulder the blame like that? But Martin took it, of course. We all know that.

OLWEN. Oh, what a fool I've been!

ROBERT. I don't understand. Surely you must have known that Martin took it. You can't have been thinking all this time that I did?

OLWEN. Yes, I have. And I've not been thinking it—I've been torturing myself with it.

ROBERT. But why, why? Damn it all—it doesn't make sense. (*He rises and moves away R.*) I might have taken the money—I suppose we're all capable of that, under certain circumstances—but never on earth could I have let somebody else—and especially Martin—take the blame for it. How could you think me capable of such a thing? (*He comes back to below table C.*) I thought you were a friend of mine, Olwen—one of my best and oldest friends.

FREDA (*rising and moving up to OLWEN*). You might as well know, Robert—

OLWEN (*rising in agitation*). Oh no, Freda. Please. Please.

FREDA (*calmly, taking OLWEN's arm*). Why not? What does it matter? You might as well know, Robert—and how you can be so dense baffles me—that Olwen is not a friend of yours.

(*OLWEN turns away up stage.*)

ROBERT. Of course she is.

FREDA. She's not. She's a woman who's in love with you—a very different thing. She's been in love with you for ages.

OLWEN (*in great distress, turning and moving back*). Freda, that's damnably unfair. It's cruel, cruel. (*She sits on the arm of the armchair L.C., her back to the audience.*)

FREDA. It's not going to hurt you. And he wanted the truth. Let him have it.

(*OLWEN rises and slowly seats herself in the armchair L.C.*)

ROBERT (*moving up to R. of OLWEN's chair*). I'm terribly sorry, Olwen. I suppose I've been stupid. We've always been very good friends and I've always been very fond of you.

OLWEN. Stop, stop! Oh, Freda, that was unforgivable. You'd no right to say that.

FREDA (*her R. hand on OLWEN's L. shoulder*). But it's true, isn't it? You wanted the truth, Robert, and here it is—some of it. Olwen's been in love with you for ages. I don't know exactly how long, but I've been aware of it for the last eighteen months. Wives always are aware of these things, you know. And not only that, I'll tell you now what I've longed to tell you for some time—that I

think you're a fool for not being aware of it yourself, for not having responded to it, for not having done something drastic about it long before this. If somebody loves you like that, for God's sake enjoy it, make the most of it, hold on to it, before it's too late.

OLWEN (*rising and staring at her*). Freda, I understand now.

FREDA. Understand what?

OLWEN. About you. I ought to have understood before.

ROBERT (*moving down to R. end of settee*). If you mean by that, that you understand now that Freda doesn't care for me very much—you're right.

(OLWEN *sits down again*.)

We've not been very happy together. Somehow our marriage hasn't worked. Nobody knows—

FREDA. Of course they know.

ROBERT (*turning to FREDA*). Do you mean you've told them?

FREDA. No, of course I haven't told them. If you mean by *they*—the people we know intimately—our own group here—they didn't need to be told.

ROBERT. But Olwen here has just said she understood about it for the first time.

OLWEN (*gently*). No, I knew about that before, Robert. It was something else I've just—

ROBERT. Well, what is it?

OLWEN (*looking out and away*). I'd rather not explain.

FREDA. Being noble now, Olwen? You needn't, you know. We're past that.

OLWEN (*in distress*). No, it's not that. It's—it's because I couldn't talk about it. There's something horrible to me about it. And I can't tell you why.

FREDA (*staring at her*). Something horrible?

OLWEN. Yes, something really horrible. Don't let's talk about that side of it.

FREDA. But, Olwen—

OLWEN. I'm sorry I said I understood. It slipped out. Please—

FREDA. Very well. (*She sits on the stool at the fireplace*.) But you've got to talk about that money now. You said you believed all along that Robert had taken it.

OLWEN. It looked to me as if he must have done.

ROBERT. But if you believed that, why didn't you say something?

FREDA. Oh, Robert—can't you see why she couldn't?

ROBERT. You mean—she was shielding me?

FREDA. Yes, of course.

ROBERT (*moving up to OLWEN*). Olwen—I'm terribly sorry. I'd no idea. (*He crosses OLWEN and moves to the armchair L.*) Though

it's fantastic, I must say, that you could think I was that kind of man and yet go on caring enough not to say anything.

FREDA } (together). { But it's not fantastic at all.
OLWEN } { That's why I said I'd been torturing myself
 } { with it.

FREDA. If you're in love with somebody, you're in love with them, and they can do all sorts of things, be as mean as hell, and you'll forgive them or just not bother about it. At least, some women will.

ROBERT (*sitting in the chair*). I don't see you doing it, Freda.

FREDA. Don't you? But there are a lot of things about me you don't see. (*To OLWEN*.) But this is what I wanted to say, Olwen. If you thought that Robert had taken that money, then you knew that Martin hadn't?

OLWEN. Yes, I was sure—after I had talked to him that last night—that Martin hadn't taken it.

FREDA (*bitterly*). But you let us all think he had.

OLWEN. I know. I know. But it didn't seem to matter then. It couldn't hurt Martin any more. He wasn't there to be hurt. And I felt I had to keep quiet.

ROBERT. Because of me?

OLWEN. Yes, because of you, Robert.

ROBERT. But Martin *must* have taken it.

OLWEN. No.

ROBERT. That's why he did what he did. He thought he'd be found out. He was terribly nervy—always was, poor chap. And he simply couldn't face it.

OLWEN. No, it wasn't that at all. You *must* believe me. I'm positive that Martin never *touched* that money.

FREDA. I've always thought it queer that he should. It wasn't Martin's style at all that—doing some sneaky work with a cheque. I know he could be wild—and rather cruel sometimes. But he couldn't be a cautious cunning little sneak-thief. It wasn't his style at all. And he didn't care enough about money.

ROBERT. He spent enough of it. He was badly in debt, you know.

FREDA. Yes, but that's just the point. He didn't mind being in debt. He could have cheerfully gone on being in debt. Money simply didn't matter. Now, you loathe being in debt. You're entirely different.

OLWEN. Yes, that was one of the reasons, I thought that you—

ROBERT. Yes, I see that. Though I think those fellows who don't care about money, who don't mind being in debt, are just the sort of fellows who help themselves to other people's.

FREDA. Yes, but not in a cautious sneaky way. That wasn't like Martin at all.

ROBERT (*pausing and thinking*). I wonder—Olwen, where did you get the idea that I'd taken it?

OLWEN. Why, because Martin himself was sure that you had taken it. He told me so.

ROBERT (*amazed*). Martin told you so?

OLWEN. Yes. That was the first thing we talked about.

ROBERT (*rising*). Martin thought I had taken it. But he knew me better than that. Why should he have thought that?

FREDA. You thought he'd been the thief. You didn't know him any better, it seems.

ROBERT (*crossing in front of OLWEN and R. to the piano*). Yes, but that's different. There were special circumstances. And I'd been told something.

(*OLWEN suddenly turns to him on this.*)

Besides, I wasn't at all sure. It wasn't until after he shot himself that I felt certain.

OLWEN (*with growing excitement*). You say you'd been told something? But then Martin had been told something too. He'd practically been told that you'd taken that cheque.

ROBERT (*staring at her*). My God!

OLWEN. And do you know who told him that you'd taken the cheque?

ROBERT. I can guess now.

FREDA. Who?

ROBERT (*making a quick move to OLWEN*). Stanton, wasn't it?

OLWEN. Yes, Stanton.

ROBERT. But Stanton told me that Martin had taken that cheque.

(*FREDA rises.*)

FREDA } (*together*). { Oh, but he—

OLWEN } { My God, he—

ROBERT. He practically proved it to me. He said he didn't want Martin given away—said we'd all stand in together,—all that sort of thing.

OLWEN. But don't you see—he told Martin all that too. And Martin would never have told me if he hadn't known—well, that I would never give you away.

ROBERT (*brooding and moving down R.*). Stanton.

FREDA (*with decision*). Then it was Stanton himself who got that money?

OLWEN. It looks like it.

FREDA. I'm sure it was. And he's capable of it. You see, he played Martin and Robert off against one another. Could you have anything more vile?

ROBERT (*thoughtfully, moving up C. to between the armchairs*). You know, it doesn't follow that Stanton himself was the thief.

FREDA. Of course he was.

ROBERT. Wait. Let's get this clear. Old Slater wanted some

money, and Mr. Whitehouse signed a bearer cheque for five hundred. Slater always insisted on bearer cheques—though God knows why. The cheque was on Mr. Whitehouse's desk. Slater didn't turn up the next morning, as he said he would, and when he did turn up, three days afterwards, the cheque wasn't there. Meanwhile it had been taken to the bank and cashed. And the bank wasn't the firm's usual place, because the cheque was on Mr. Whitehouse's private account. Only Stanton, Martin or I could have got at the cheque—except dear old Watson, who certainly didn't take it. And—this is the point—none of us was known at this branch at all, but they said the fellow who cashed the cheque was about Martin's age or mine. They were rather vague, I gathered, but what they did remember of him certainly ruled out Stanton himself.

OLWEN. Mr. Whitehouse wouldn't have you identified at the bank, I remember.

FREDA. No, he was too fond of them all, and too hurt. He wasn't well at the time, either.

ROBERT. I understood that he simply wanted the one who had taken the money to confess and then go.

OLWEN. He told me that too.

FREDA. Me too. Father was like that, of course. But what made you believe Martin had taken the cheque?

ROBERT. The evidence pointed to Martin and me, and I knew I hadn't taken it.

FREDA (*slowly*). And Stanton told you—?

ROBERT. Stanton told me he'd seen Martin coming out of your father's room.

OLWEN. Stanton told Martin he'd seen *you* coming out of that room.

FREDA (*with decision*). Stanton took that money himself.

ROBERT (*fiercely*). Whether he took the money or not, Stanton's got to explain this. (*He moves quickly down R. and to the door, opens it and snatches up the telephone receiver.*) No wonder he didn't approve of this business and was glad to get out of it. He's got too much to hide.

OLWEN. We'd all got too much to hide.

(FREDA moves up round OLWEN's chair to the piano-stool and sits.)

ROBERT. Then we'll let some daylight into it for once, if it kills us. Stanton's got to explain this. Chantbury one-two. They've probably all gone to bed.

FREDA. Are you going to get them all back, Robert.

ROBERT. Yes. Hello, is that you, Gordon? . . . (*He moves into the room, to the top step.*) He is, is he? Well, I want you both to come back here . . . Yes, more and more of it. . . . It's damned important. . . . Yes, we're all in it. Oh, no, of course

not. We can keep Betty out of it. (FREDa and OLWEN exchange glances.) All right then. Be as quick as you can. (He puts down the receiver, comes back into the room and closes the door, then switches on the light at the doorway.) They're coming back. (He moves down the steps into the room.)

QUICK CURTAIN.

ACT II

The SCENE is the same.

ROBERT, FREDa, and OLWEN are discovered in exactly the same positions as they were at the end of Act I.

ROBERT (*switching on the light and coming into the room*). They're coming back.

FREDa. All of them? (*She rises and goes round to the side of the piano.*)

ROBERT (*moving across c.*). No, not Betty. She's going to bed. (*He goes to R. of OLWEN, who is seated in the armchair L.O.*)

OLWEN (*with a touch of bitterness*). Wise little Betty.

ROBERT. I don't see why you should use that tone of voice, Olwen—as if Betty was cleverly dodging something. You know very well she's not mixed up in this business.

OLWEN. Do I?

ROBERT (*alarmed*). Well, don't you?

FREDa (*grimly amused*). Poor Robert! look at him now. This is really serious, he's saying to himself. How we give ourselves away. It's a mystery we have any secrets at all.

ROBERT. No, but—hang it all, Olwen—you've no right to sneer at Betty like that. You know very well it's better to keep her out of all this.

OLWEN. No, we mustn't soil her pure young mind.

ROBERT. Well, after all, she's younger than we are—and she's terribly sensitive. You saw what happened to her just before they went. She couldn't stand the atmosphere of all this.

OLWEN. But that wasn't—

ROBERT. Obviously you dislike her, Olwen. I can't imagine why. She's always had a great admiration for you.

OLWEN. Well, I'm sorry, Robert, but I can't return her admiration—except for her looks. I don't dislike her. But—well, I can't be as sorry for her as I'd like to be or ought to be.

ROBERT (*crossing down R. to below piano*). You can't be sorry for her? Is it necessary for you or anybody else to be sorry for her? You're talking wildly now, Olwen.

FREDa. I suspect not, Robert. And anyhow, it seems to be our evening for talking wildly. Also, I'm now facing a most urgent problem, the sort of problem that only women have to face. If a man has been dragged back to your house to be told he's a liar and

a cad and a sneak and a possible thief, ought you to make a few sandwiches for him?

ROBERT (*heavily, moving to chair below L. of piano and sitting*). He'll get no sandwiches from me.

FREDA (*moving slightly down*). No sincerity, no sandwiches—that's your motto, is it? No? (*She turns to the piano and switches on the lamp*.) Oh dear—how heavy we are without Martin. And how he would have adored all this. (*She moves up again to the bay of the piano*.) He'd have invented the most extravagant and incredible sins to confess to. Oh, don't look so dreadfully solemn, you two. You might be a bit brighter—just for a minute.

ROBERT (*heavily*). I'm afraid we haven't got your light touch, my dear Freda.

FREDA. I suppose I feel like this because, in spite of everything, I feel like a hostess expecting company, and I can't help thinking about bright remarks and sandwiches.

(*A bell rings out in the hall.*)

And there they are. You'll have to let them in yourself, Robert.

(ROBERT rises and goes out. As soon as the two women are left together the atmosphere changes. They speak in quick whispers.)

OLWEN (*rising*). Have you really known a long time? (*She moves to L. of armchair R.O.*)

FREDA (*going to R. of armchair R.O.*). Yes. More than a year. I've often wanted to say something to you about it.

OLWEN. What would you have said?

FREDA. I don't quite know. Something idiotic. (*Taking both her hands.*) But friendly, very friendly.

OLWEN. And I only guessed about you to-night, Freda. And now it all seems so obvious. I can't think why I never guessed before.

FREDA. Neither can I.

OLWEN. This is quite mad, isn't it?

FREDA. Quite mad. And rapidly getting madder. I don't care. Do you? It's rather a relief.

OLWEN. Yes, it is—in a way. But it's rather frightening too. Like being in a car when the brakes are gone.

FREDA. And there are cross-roads and corners ahead.

(*The men are heard outside. OLWEN moves up to L. of window. FREDA to above armchair R.O. STANTON comes in first, followed by GORDON, then ROBERT.*)

STANTON (*as he enters*). I can't see why. (*He goes to L. of the piano.*) I'm sorry about this, Freda, but it's Robert's doing. He insisted on our coming back.

FREDA. Well, I think Robert was right.

GORDON (*who has gone straight to the settee and sprawled on it*). That's a change, anyhow. Well, what's it all about?

ROBERT (*on the steps*). Chiefly about that money.

GORDON (*disgusted*). Oh—hell—I thought as much. Why can't you leave poor Martin alone?

ROBERT (*moving off the steps to below the piano keyboard*). Wait a minute, Gordon. Martin didn't take that cheque.

GORDON (*leaping to his feet above the settee*). What? Is that true? Are you sure?

FREDA (*moving to L. of armchair R.O.*). Yes.

(*OLWEN comes down to above armchair L.O.*)

GORDON. You know, I never could understand that. It wasn't like Martin.

STANTON (*to FREDA and ROBERT*). Do you really believe that Martin didn't get that money? If he didn't, who did? And if he didn't, why did he shoot himself?

ROBERT (*very deliberately, and leaning across the piano*). Stanton, we don't know. But we're hoping that you'll tell us.

STANTON. Being funny, Robert?

ROBERT. Not a bit. I wouldn't have dragged you back here to be funny. You told me—didn't you—that you were practically certain that Martin took that cheque?

STANTON. Certainly I did. And I told you why I thought so. All the evidence pointed that way. And what happened afterwards proved that I was right.

ROBERT. Did it?

STANTON. Well, didn't it?

FREDA (*in a sudden flare of passion, moving down R. of and level with table C.*). If it did, then, why did you tell Martin that you thought Robert had done it?

(*OLWEN crosses to behind armchair R.C.*)

STANTON (*uneasily*). Don't be ridiculous, Freda. Why should I tell Martin that I thought Robert had done it?

FREDA. Yes, why should you? That's what we want to know.

STANTON. But of course I didn't.

OLWEN (*quietly, moving down to L. of STANTON*). Yes, you did.

STANTON (*turning to her, despairingly*). Olwen! Are you in this too?

OLWEN. Yes, I'm in it too. Because you lied like that to Martin, telling him you were sure Robert took the cheque, you've given me hours and hours and hours of misery.

STANTON. But I never meant to, Olwen. How could I know that you would go and see Martin and that he would tell you?

OLWEN. It doesn't matter whether you knew or not. It was a mean, vile lie. After this I feel that I never want to speak to you again.

STANTON (*utterly wretched*). I'm sorry, Olwen. I'd rather anything had happened than that. You do believe that, don't you? (*He looks at her appealingly but gets no response.*)

(*OLWEN turns away, goes up to the window-seat and sits R.C.*)

FREDA (*cuttingly*). Apparently the rest of us don't matter very much. But you owe us a few explanations.

ROBERT. You'd better stop lying now, Stanton. You've done enough. Why did you play off Martin and me against each other like that?

FREDA. There can only be one explanation. Because he took that cheque himself.

GORDON. My God—you didn't, did you, Stanton?

STANTON. Yes, I did.

(*GORDON rushes over to STANTON with threatening gestures. FREDA turns to stop him.*)

GORDON (*exultedly*). Then you're a rotten swine, Stanton. I don't care about the money. But you let Martin take the blame. You let everybody think he was a thief.

(*FREDA crosses to the stool by the fireplace and sits.*)

STANTON (*pushing GORDON into the chair below L. of piano*). Don't be such a hysterical young fool.

ROBERT (*holding GORDON down in the chair*). Shut up, Gordon.

STANTON. Keep quiet and stop waving your hands at me. We don't want this to develop into a free fight. (*He moves up to behind the armchair R.C.*)

GORDON (*as STANTON gets to the chair*). But you let—

STANTON. I didn't let Martin take the blame, as you call it. He wasn't the sort to take the blame, and you ought to know that. It happened that in the middle of all the fuss about this money, he went and shot himself. You all jumped to the conclusion that it was because he had taken the money and was afraid of being found out. I let you go on thinking it, that's all. You might as well think he shot himself for that as for anything else. And anyhow, he was done with it, out of it. Where he's gone to, it doesn't matter a damn whether people here think you've stolen five hundred pounds or not.

ROBERT (*moving up R.C., level with STANTON*). But you deliberately tried to fasten the blame on to Martin or me.

FREDA. Of course he did. That's what makes it so foul.

STANTON. Not really. I'd not the least intention of letting anybody else be punished for what I'd done. I was only playing for time. I took that cheque because I'd got to have some money quickly, and I didn't know where to turn. I knew I could square it up in a week, and I knew, too, that if necessary I could make it all right with old Slater, who's a sportsman. But when it all came out,

I'd got to play for time, and that seemed to me the easiest way of doing it.

ROBERT. But you couldn't have cashed the cheque at the bank yourself?

STANTON. No, I got somebody else to do that—a fellow who could keep his mouth shut. It was pure coincidence that he was a fellow about the same age and build as you and Martin. Don't go thinking there was any deep-laid plot. There wasn't. There never is in real life. It was all improvised and haphazard and damned stupid. (*He goes over to behind the armchair L.O.*)

ROBERT. Why didn't you confess to this before?

STANTON (*turning to him*). Why the devil should I?

FREDA. If you can't understand why, it's hopeless for us to try and show you. But there's such a thing as common honesty and decency.

STANTON. Is there? I wonder. Don't forget—before you become too self-righteous—that you happen to be taking the lid off me. It might be somebody else's turn before we've finished.

ROBERT. Possibly. But that doesn't explain why you've kept so quiet about all this.

STANTON. I should have thought it did. Martin's suicide put paid to the whole thing. Nobody wanted to talk about it after that. Dear Martin must have done it, so we won't mention it. That was the line. It wasn't the five hundred. I'd have been glad to replace that. But I knew damned well that if I confessed, the old man would have had me out of the firm in two minutes. I wasn't one of his pets like you and Martin. I'd had to work myself up from nothing in the firm. I hadn't been brought in because I had the right university and social backgrounds. If the old man had thought for a minute that I'd done it, there'd have been none of this hush-hush business. He'd have felt like calling in the police. Don't forget, I'd been a junior clerk in the office. You fellows hadn't. It makes a difference, I can tell you.

FREDA (*rising and going up to L. of STANTON*). But my father's been retired from the firm for six months.

STANTON. Well, what if he has? The whole thing was over and done with. Why open it up again? It might never have been mentioned if you hadn't started on this damnfool inquisition to-night. Robert, Gordon and I were all working well together in the firm. What would have happened if I'd confessed? Where are we? Who's better off because of this?

FREDA. You're not, it's true. But Martin is. And the people who cared about Martin.

STANTON. Are they?

FREDA. Of course they are.

STANTON. Don't be too sure.

FREDA. At least we know now that he wasn't a mean thief.

STANTON. And that's all you do know. But for all that he went

and shot himself. And you don't suppose he did it for fun, do you ?
(*He turns away up L.*)

FREDA (*terribly hurt*). Oh—you—you—— (*She turns away to the fireplace.*)

GORDON (*furiously, rising and taking a step forward*). You are a rotter, Stanton.

ROBERT (*crossing to STANTON*). Drop that sort of talk, Stanton.

(*These last three lines are spoken together.*)

STANTON (*turning on them*). Why should I ? You wanted the truth, and now you're getting it. I didn't want to come back here and be put in the witness-box. It's your own doing. I'll say what I damn well like.

(*FREDA turns to STANTON.*)

Martin shot himself, and he did it knowing that he'd never touched the money. So it must have been something else. Well, what was it ? You see what you've started now.

(*GORDON sits down again in his chair.*)

FREDA (*coldly, moving up to top end of the stool*). Well, what have we started ? You're talking now as if you knew a lot more about Martin than we did.

STANTON. What I *do* know is that he must have had some reason for doing what he did, and that if it wasn't the money, it must have been something else. You're probably a lot better off for not knowing what that something is, just as you'd have been a lot better off if you'd never started poking about and prying into all this business.

ROBERT (*thoughtfully, moving down R.C. slightly*). Perhaps he did it because he thought I'd taken the money.

STANTON (*sardonically*). And then again—perhaps not.

(*ROBERT moves up R. again.*)

If you think that Martin would have shot himself because he thought you'd taken some money—then you didn't know your own brother. Why, he laughed when I told him. It amused him. A lot of things amused that young man.

OLWEN (*wearily*). That's true, I know. He didn't care. He didn't care at all.

ROBERT (*crossing quickly to STANTON*). Look here—do you know why Martin did shoot himself ?

STANTON. No. How should I ?

FREDA (*with rising temper*). You talk as if you do.

STANTON. I can imagine reasons.

FREDA (*very sharply*). What do you mean by that ?

STANTON. I mean he was that sort of chap. He'd got his life into a mess.

ROBERT. Well, I don't think it's—

STANTON (*at ROBERT*). I don't blame him.

FREDA (*furiously*). You don't blame him! Who are you to blame him or not to blame him? You're not fit to mention his name. You hung your mean little piece of thieving round his neck, tried to poison our memory of him, and now when you're found out and Martin's name is clear of it, you want to begin all over again and start hinting that he was a criminal or a lunatic or something.

ROBERT. That's true. The less you say now, the better.

STANTON (*harshly*). The less we all say, the better. You should have thought of that before. I told you as much before you began dragging all this stuff out. Like a fool, you wouldn't leave well alone.

ROBERT. Anyway, I've cleared Martin's name.

STANTON. You've cleared nothing yet, and if you'd a glimmer of sense you'd see it.

(ROBERT moves away to the piano.)

But now I don't give a damn. You're going to get all you ask for.

FREDA (*still furious*). One of the things we shall ask for is to be rid of you.

GORDON. Do you think you'll stay on with the firm after this?

STANTON. I don't know and I don't care.

FREDA. You did a year ago.

STANTON. Yes, but now I don't. I can get along better now without the firm than they can without me.

GORDON (*rising and moving up c. to between the armchairs*). Well, after this, at least it will be a pleasure to try. You always hated Martin, and I knew it.

STANTON. I had my reasons. Unlike the Whitehouse family—father, daughter and son—who all fell in love with him.

(GORDON turns away and sits in the armchair R.C. FREDA staggers, moves to downstage end of the stool and leans hard on it.)

ROBERT (*crossing to STANTON and saying slowly*). Does that mean anything, Stanton? If it doesn't, just take it back—now. If it does, you'll kindly explain yourself.

STANTON. I'll take nothing back.

OLWEN (*rising and coming down between them*). Stanton—please. Don't let's have any more of this. We've all said too much already.

STANTON (*turning to her*). I'm sorry, Olwen. But you can't blame me.

ROBERT (*with cold deliberation*). I'm waiting for your explanation.

FREDA (*turning to them*). Don't you see, it's me he's getting at?

ROBERT. Is that true, Stanton?

STANTON. I'm certainly not leaving her out.

ROBERT. Be careful.

STANTON. It's too late to be careful. Why do you think Freda's

been so angry with me? There's only one reason, and I've known it for a long time. She was in love with Martin.

(FREDa gives a cry and sits on the stool. OLWEN goes up to the window again and sits. ROBERT stares at FREDa, then at STANTON, then at her again.)

ROBERT (*crossing to FREDa and standing above her*). Is that true, Freda? I must know, because if it isn't I'm going to kick Stanton out of this house. (*Looking back at STANTON.*)

STANTON (*talking over the back of the armchair L.C.*). Don't talk like a man in a melodrama, Caplan. I wouldn't have said it if I hadn't known it was true. Whether she admits it or not is another matter. But even if she doesn't admit it, you're not going to kick me out of the house. I'll go in the ordinary way, thank you.

ROBERT (*putting his L. knee on the stool and leaning on the mantel-piece*). Freda, is it true?

FREDa (*whispering*). Yes.

(GORDON rises aimlessly, and in his own time moves round to the L. arm of the armchair R.C. and sits. STANTON crosses over R. to the drink table, moves reslessly up and down a few times, then pours out a drink.)

ROBERT. Has that been the trouble all along?

FREDa. Yes. All along.

ROBERT (*who speaks as if they were alone*). When did it begin?

FREDa. A long time ago. Or it seems a long time ago. Ages.

ROBERT. Before we were married?

FREDa. Yes. I thought I could—break it—then. I did for a little time. But it came back, worse than ever.

ROBERT. I wish you'd told me. (*Leaning over her.*) Why didn't you tell me?

FREDa. I wanted to. Hundreds of times I seem to have tried to. I've said the opening words to myself—you know—and sometimes I've hardly known whether I didn't actually say them out loud to you.

ROBERT. I wish you had, I wish you had. But why didn't I see it for myself? It seems plain enough now. I must have been a fool. I know now when it began. It was when we were all down at Tintagel that summer.

(GORDON, who is still sitting on the arm of the chair, turns his head away up stage.)

FREDa. Yes, it began then. Tintagel, that lovely, lovely summer. Nothing's ever been quite real since then.

(OLWEN leans her chin on her hand.)

ROBERT. Martin went away walking, and you said you'd stay a few days with the Hutchinsons. Was that—?

FREDA. Yes, Martin and I spent that little time together, of course. It was the only time we did really spend together. It didn't mean much to him—a sort of experiment, that's all.

ROBERT. But didn't Martin care?

FREDA. No, not really. If he had have done, it would have been all so simple. That's why I never told you. And I thought when we were married, it would be—different. It wasn't fair to you, I know, but I thought it would be all right. And so did Martin. But it wasn't. You know that too. It was hopeless. But you don't know how hopeless it was—for me.

(ROBERT sighs, moves slightly L.C. and takes the rest of them in.)

ROBERT. But why didn't Martin himself tell me? He knew how unhappy I was.

FREDA. He couldn't. He was rather afraid of you.

ROBERT. Martin afraid of me?

GORDON. Yes, he was.

ROBERT. Nonsense. He wasn't afraid of anybody—and certainly not of me.

FREDA. Yes, he was, in some queer way.

OLWEN (*rising, coming R. of armchair L.C. and saying very gently*). That's true, Robert. He was. I knew that.

GORDON. So did I. He told me that when you're really angry, you'll stop at nothing.

ROBERT (*brooding*). Queer. I never knew Martin felt like that. And it was he who—I wonder why? What was it? (*To FREDA*.) It couldn't have been—this—

FREDA (*rising, and leaning her head on her arm on the mantelpiece*). No, no. He didn't care. (*Breaking down completely*.) Oh, Martin, Martin— (*She falls into the armchair L.*)

OLWEN (*moving down to FREDA and putting her arms round her*). Freda, Freda—don't.

(ROBERT moves up to above the armchair R.C.)

STANTON (*while OLWEN is still comforting FREDA*). That's how it goes on, you see, Caplan. A good evening's work this.

ROBERT. I'm not regretting it. I'm glad all this has come out. I wish to God I'd known earlier, that's all.

STANTON. What difference would it have made? You couldn't have done anything.

ROBERT (*moving slowly down to below the piano keyboard*). To begin with, I'd have known the truth. And then something might have been done about it. I wouldn't have stood in their way.

STANTON. You didn't stand in their way.

GORDON (*facing front*). No, it was Martin himself, you see. He didn't care, as Freda says. I knew. (*At FREDA*.) He told me about it.

ROBERT (*turning, incredulously*). He told you?

GORDON. Yes.

ROBERT. Freda's brother?

FREDA (*pushing OLWEN aside and looking up*). Gordon, I don't believe you.

GORDON (*hotly*). Why should I lie about it? Martin told me. He used to tell me everything.

FREDA (*rising and moving over to GORDON*). Rubbish. He thought you were a little nuisance—always hanging about him.

GORDON (*rising*). That's not true.

FREDA. It is. He told me so that—that very last Saturday, when I took him the cigarette-box.

(*OLWEN moves up to top end of the mantelpiece.*)

He told me then you'd stayed the night before at the cottage and that he'd had to do everything he could to get rid of you.

GORDON. Freda—you're making this up, every word about me, I know you are. Martin would never have said that about me. He knew how fond I was of him, and he was fond of me too, in his own way.

FREDA. He wasn't.

GORDON. You're just saying this because you're jealous.

FREDA. I'm not.

GORDON. You've always been jealous of Martin's interest in me.

FREDA. Gordon, that's simply a disgusting lie.

GORDON. It isn't.

FREDA. It is. He told me himself how tired he was of your hanging about him and suddenly becoming hysterical. I see what he meant now. Every time he's been mentioned to-night you've been hysterical. (*Putting her hands to her head and turning away.*) What are you trying to persuade me into believing you are?

ROBERT (*sharply*). Freda, you're mad.

GORDON (*shrilly, in a rage and turning to ROBERT*). It's all jealousy, jealousy! If he'd thought I was a nuisance, Martin wouldn't have kept asking me down to the cottage. (*Turning to FREDA.*) But he was tired of *you*, pestering him and worrying him all the time. He didn't care for women. He was sick of them. He told me so. He wanted me to tell you so that you'd leave him alone.

FREDA (*wildly, and moving slightly L.*). You're making me feel sick.

GORDON (*following her over*). Well, you just leave me—

OLWEN (*distressed, moving L.C. and pushing GORDON away*). Stop it. Stop it, both of you.

STANTON (*grimly, putting his empty glass down on the piano*). Let them have it out. They might as well, now they've started. (*He crosses to L. and sits at the lower end of fireplace stool.*)

(*OLWEN moves back to top end of the mantelpiece.*)

GORDON (*to FREDa*). And I was going to tell you, too. Only then—he killed himself.

FREDa. I don't believe it. I don't believe it. Martin couldn't have been so cruel.

GORDON (*close to her*). Couldn't he? What did he say to you that afternoon when you took him the cigarette-box?

FREDa (*turning away down stage slightly*). What does it matter what he said? You're just making up these abominable lies—

ROBERT (*roughly, moving over to R. of FREDa*). Look here, I'm not having any more of this. You're like a pair of lunatics—screaming at each other like that over a dead man.

(FREDa falls weeping on to the settee. OLWEN goes up to L. of window.)

I understand about you, Freda, and I'm sorry—but for God's sake keep quiet about it now. I can't stand any more. As for you, Gordon—you must be tight or something—

GORDON (*sulking*). I'm not. I'm as sober as you are. (*He turns away up stage.*)

ROBERT. Well, behave as if you were. You're not a child. (*Crossing to below the piano.*) I know Martin was a friend of yours—

GORDON (*turning on ROBERT—hotly and scornfully*). Friend of mine! He wasn't a friend of mine. You talk like a fish. Martin was the only person on earth I really cared about. I couldn't help it. There it was. I'd have done anything for him. Five hundred pounds! My God, I'd have stolen five thousand pounds from the firm if Martin had asked me to. He was the most marvellous person I'd ever known. Sometimes I tried to hate him. Sometimes he gave me a hell of a time. But it didn't really matter. He was Martin, and I'd rather be with him, even if he was just jeering at me all the time, than be with anybody else I've ever known. (*He turns away, runs his hands over his face, then turns back again.*) I'm like Freda—since he died, I haven't really cared a damn, I've just been passing the time. He didn't really care for women at all. He tried to amuse himself with them, but he really distrusted them, disliked them. He told me so, many a time. Martin told me everything. And that was the finest thing that ever happened to me. And now you can call me any name you like, I don't care.

(*He moves down and sits on the L. arm of the armchair R.O., nervously taking out a cigarette-case. He takes a cigarette, trembling all over. There is a silence. He looks at them all defiantly. ROBERT makes an impulsive move towards GORDON, hesitates, then moves up stage.*)

ROBERT (*coming back to GORDON*). But what about Betty?

GORDON (*sullenly, taking the cigarette out of his mouth*). You can leave her out of this.

ROBERT (*coming to R. of GORDON's armchair*). I want to. But I can't help thinking about her.

GORDON. Well, you needn't. She can look after herself.

ROBERT. That's just what she can't do, and she oughtn't to have to do. You ought to see that.

GORDON. Well, I don't see it. And I know Betty better than you do.

FREDA. You know everybody better than anybody else does, don't you?

GORDON (*striking a match*). You would say that, wouldn't you? I can't help it if Martin liked me better than he liked you.

FREDA. How do you know that he——

(GORDON *lights his cigarette*.)

OLWEN (*coming down L. of GORDON*). Oh, stop that. Stop it, both of you. Can't you see that Martin was making mischief, just to amuse himself?

(ROBERT *goes to the piano*.)

GORDON (*sulkily*). No, I can't. He wasn't like that.

STANTON (*with irony*). Oh no. Not at all like that. You couldn't ask for a quieter, simpler, more sincere fellow.

FREDA (*holly*). Nobody's going to pretend he was that. But at least he didn't steal money and then try to put the blame on other people.

STANTON. We could all start talking like that, you know, Freda. Just throwing things at each other's heads. But I suggest we don't.

OLWEN. I agree. But I do want Freda and Gordon to understand that it's simply madness quarrelling over anything Martin ever said to them.

(GORDON *half falls into the armchair*.)

He was a born mischief-maker and as cruel as a cat. That's one of the reasons why I disliked him so much.

ROBERT (*moving to c.*). Disliked him?

OLWEN. Yes, I'm sorry, Robert, but I didn't like Martin. I detested him. You ought to have seen that.

STANTON. I saw it. And you were quite right. I'm afraid you always are, Olwen.

OLWEN. No, I'm not.

STANTON. I'd trust your judgment.

ROBERT. So would I, for that matter.

OLWEN (*shaking her head slowly*). No. No.

STANTON. And you're the only one of us who will come out of this as sound as you went in.

OLWEN (*embarrassed and a little alarmed*). No, that's not true. (*She turns away up L.*)

(ROBERT *crosses to the table up R. and pours out a drink, then goes and leans on the piano*.)

GORDON (*now sitting in the armchair properly*). No—it was Olwen and that damned cigarette-box that began the whole business.

STANTON. Oh, that was nothing. I knew about that all along.

OLWEN (*facing him*). You knew about what?

STANTON. I knew you'd been to see Martin Caplan that Saturday night.

OLWEN (*alarmed*). You knew?

STANTON. Yes.

OLWEN. But how could you! I don't understand.

STANTON. I was spending that week-end at my own cottage. You remember that garage, where the road forks? You stopped there that night for some petrol.

OLWEN (*remembering*). Yes, I believe I did.

STANTON. They told me, and said you'd taken the Fallows End road, and so I knew you must have been going to see Martin. You couldn't have been going anywhere else, could you? Quite simple.

OLWEN (*staring at him*). And you've known all this time?

STANTON. Yes. All this time.

ROBERT (*rather bitterly*). I suppose, Stanton, it's no use asking you why you've never said a word about it?

STANTON (*coolly*). I'm afraid not. I think I've done my share in the confession box to-night.

GORDON. Well, I wish I'd known a bit more, that's all. There was I dragged into that foul inquest.

(OLWEN *leans against the curtain L. of the window.*)

Did I know this? Did I know that? My God—and all the time I wasn't the last person he'd talked to at all. Freda had been there some time in the afternoon. And Olwen was there that very night, at the very moment—for all we know.

STANTON. Don't talk rubbish.

GORDON. Well, is it rubbish? (*Indicating OLWEN.*) After all, what do we know? What was Olwen doing there?

ROBERT (*moving to R. of GORDON's chair*). She's told us that. She was there to talk to Martin about the money.

GORDON. And how far does that take us?

STANTON. What do you mean by that?

FREDA. He means—I imagine—that Olwen hasn't told us very much so far. We know she went to Martin to talk to him about the missing money. And we know that Martin thought Robert had taken it and that she thought so too. And that's all we do know.

GORDON. Yes, we don't know how long she was there or what Martin said to her, or anything. It's a good job *she* wasn't pushed in front of that coroner, or they'd have had it out of her in no time.

(OLWEN *moves up to C. of the window.*)

(*Turning round to OLWEN.*) I think it's up to *her* to tell us a little more.

STANTON. Well, there's no need to sound so damned vindictive about it.

(*OLWEN, who has just looked out through the window, pulling the curtain back a little, suddenly starts back and gives a little scream.*)

ROBERT }
STANTON } (*together*). Hello, what's the matter?

(*ROBERT goes up to R. of the window and looks out. GORDON rises and moves up to L. of OLWEN. FRED A rises and moves up to below L. of the window. STANTON doesn't move.*)

ROBERT (*still looking out*). There's nobody there now.

OLWEN. No, they darted away. But I'll swear there was somebody. They'd been listening.

STANTON (*grimly*). Well, they couldn't have chosen a better night for it.

ROBERT. It's impossible, Olwen. And there isn't a sign of anybody.

GORDON. Thank the Lord for that.

(*They all start to move forward, and as they move, there are several short rings of a door bell heard from off R. They all stop and look at one another in surprise and consternation.*)

ROBERT. Who on earth can this be?

FRED A. Don't ask me. I haven't the least idea. Go and see.

ROBERT. Yes, I know. But we don't want anybody interrupting us now.

FRED A. Well, don't let them interrupt us, whoever they are. But you'll have to see who it is.

(*The bell rings again and ROBERT goes out. While he is away nobody speaks and they all look somewhat constrained. FRED A drifts to the bay of the piano. OLWEN is standing in the window, L. of it. Then the voices of ROBERT and BETTY can be heard. GORDON moves quickly across to the steps at the door.*)

ROBERT (*heard outside*). But we haven't, I tell you. You've never been mentioned.

BETTY (*outside*). I know you have. I can feel it. That's why I had to come back.

ROBERT (*outside*). I tell you we haven't.

(*ROBERT opens the door and BETTY is seen in front of him.*)

GORDON. I thought you'd gone to bed, Betty. What's the matter?

BETTY (*on the top step, just inside the door*). You're talking about me, all of you. (*Looking round at them all.*) I know you are. I wanted to go to bed. I started to go. And then I couldn't. I knew you were all talking about me. I couldn't stand it. I had to come back.

(STANTON rises and moves to L.C.)

FREDA (*coldly*). Well, you were wrong. As a matter of fact, you're the one person we *haven't* been talking about.

BETTY (*looking at GORDON, STANTON and then ROBERT*). Is that true?

ROBERT. Yes, of course.

(*The others nod an affirmative.*)

OLWEN (*pointing at BETTY*). You were outside just now, weren't you? Outside the window, listening?

(BETTY, *confused, comes down the steps into the room.*)

BETTY (*crossing to the settee, taking off her fur coat and putting it at the R. end*). No, I wasn't listening. I was trying to peep in, to see exactly who was here and what you all looked like.

(STANTON goes back to his seat on the stool.)

You see, I was sure you were all saying things about me. And I meant to go to bed and I was tired, but I felt too excited inside to sleep, and so I took three of those tablets I have to make me sleep and now I feel absolutely dopey. (*She moves up to the armchair R.C.*) God knows what I shall be saying in a minute. You mustn't mind me. (*She sinks into the chair.*)

ROBERT (*shutting the door and moving to R. of BETTY's chair and leaning over her*). I'm so sorry, Betty. Can I get you anything? (*As she shakes her head.*) Sure? (*She shakes her head again.*) And not a word's been said about you. In fact, we all wanted to keep you out of this. It's all rather unpleasant.

FREDA (*with irony*). But seeing that Betty has married into one of the families concerned, I think she ought not to be too carefully protected from the sordid truth.

ROBERT (*turning to her and losing his temper*). Oh shut up, Freda.

FREDA. I won't. Why should I? (*To OLWEN.*) I thought we should see a different Robert now.

ROBERT (*moving up to FREDA*). After what you've said to-night, I can't see that it matters much to you how different I may be.

FREDA. Perhaps not, but I still like reasonably decent manners.

ROBERT. Then set us an example. (*He moves to behind BETTY's chair.*)

GORDON (*moving to piano keyboard*). Oh, shut up, both of you.

BETTY. But what have you been talking about then?

GORDON. It began about the money.

BETTY. You mean that Martin took?

GORDON. Martin didn't take it. We know that now. Stanton took that money. He's admitted it.

(BETTY gives a short cry.)

BETTY (*with surprise, a trifle overdone*). Admitted it! Stan—Stanton? Oh, surely—it's impossible.

STANTON (*rising and moving in to L. of the table*). It sounds impossible, doesn't it, Betty, but it isn't. I'm sorry to go down with such a bump in your estimation, my dear Betty, but this is our night for telling the truth, and I've had to admit that I took that money. Terrible, isn't it?

(STANTON looks at BETTY and she avoids his glance, uncomfortably.

ROBERT looks from one to the other of them.)

ROBERT (*moving towards STANTON*). What did you mean by that, Stanton?

STANTON. I meant what I said. I nearly always do.

ROBERT. Why did you use that tone of voice to Betty?

STANTON. Perhaps—because I think that Betty has not a very high opinion of me—and so need not have sounded so surprised and shocked.

ROBERT (*slowly*). I don't quite understand that.

FREDA (*sarcastically*). I'm sure you don't, Robert.

(STANTON moves L. again to lower end of fireplace stool.)

ROBERT (*turning on her sharply*). Do you?

FREDA (*sweetly*). Yes, I think so.

BETTY (*hastily*). But if Martin didn't take the money—then why—why—did he shoot himself?

GORDON. That's what we want to know.

(OLWEN moves to R. of the window.)

Olwen saw him last of all, that very evening, and she knew he hadn't taken the money, but that's all she's told us.

OLWEN. I've told you that he thought Robert had taken the money. (*She sits at R.C. of the window-seat.*)

ROBERT (*moving down to L. end of the settee*). And that was enough—in the state he was in then—to throw him clean off his balance. All that stuff about his merely being amused is nonsense. That was just his bluff. Martin hated anybody to think he was really moved or alarmed by anything.

GORDON. That's true.

ROBERT (*with growing excitement, and moving up L.C. to above the armchairs c.*). And he depended on me. He used to laugh a lot at me, but that was nothing. He depended on me. You've told me yourselves—that he was secretly rather frightened of me. It was because Martin had a respect for me. He thought I was the solid steady one. I was one of the very few people he had a respect for. I tell you, it must have been a hell of a shock to poor Martin.

OLWEN. I don't think it was, Robert.

STANTON. Neither do I.

ROBERT. But neither of you knew him as I did. What's the

good of talking? He was in a wretched state, all run down and neurotic, and when he heard that I'd taken the cheque he must have felt that there was nobody left he could depend on, that I'd let him down. He'd probably been brooding over it day and night—he was that sort. (*Turning to OLWEN.*) He wouldn't let you see it, Olwen. But it would be there all the time, giving him hell. Oh, what a fool I was. (*He comes down between the armchairs and sits in the one L.O.*)

GORDON. You?

ROBERT. Yes, of course. I ought to have gone straight to Martin and told him what Stanton had told me.

GORDON. If this is true, then the person really responsible is Stanton.

FREDA. Yes.

(*OLWEN rises, moves about in window from R. to L., then back again.*)

STANTON. Rubbish!

FREDA. It isn't. Don't you see what you did?

STANTON. No, because I don't believe it.

GORDON. No, because you don't choose to, that's all.

STANTON. Oh, talk sense. Can't you see Martin had his own reasons?

ROBERT. No. What drove Martin to suicide was my stupidity and your damned lying, Stanton. (*He rises.*)

BETTY (*bursting into tears*). Oh!

ROBERT (*moving to BETTY*). Oh, sorry, Betty—but this has got to be settled, once and for all.

STANTON. You're none of you in a state to settle anything.

ROBERT (*crossing to STANTON*). Listen to me, Stanton—

STANTON. Oh, drop it, man.

GORDON (*crossing above the settee to L. of it*). You've got to answer.

ROBERT. I'll never forgive you for telling Martin what you did—by God I won't!

STANTON. You've got it all wrong.

GORDON. They haven't, you rotten liar! (*He moves as if to strike him.*)

STANTON (*pushing him aside*). Oh, get out!

GORDON (*shouting and about to go for him again*). You made Martin shoot himself.

OLWEN. Wait a minute, Gordon.

(*Everybody turns and focuses their eyes on OLWEN, who is standing facing them in R.O. of the window.*)

Martin didn't shoot himself.

QUICK CURTAIN.

ACT III

The SCENE is the same.

All are discovered in exactly the same positions as they were at the end of Act II.

OLWEN. Martin didn't shoot himself.

FREDA. Martin didn't—

OLWEN. Of course he didn't. I shot him.

(BETTY gives a little scream. The others gasp and stare.)

ROBERT *(moving up to OLWEN)*. That's ridiculous, Olwen. You couldn't have done.

GORDON. Is this your idea of a joke?

OLWEN. I wish it was. *(She suddenly sits down and buries her face in her hands. She does not make any sound, however.)*

GORDON. Olwen!

(STANTON moves up to L. of OLWEN.)

ROBERT *(with lowered voice)*. She must be hysterical or something.

(GORDON moves to the armchair L. and sits.)

I believe people often confess to all sorts of mad things in that state; things they could not possibly have done.

STANTON *(shaking his head)*. Olwen's not hysterical. She means it.

BETTY *(in a whisper)*. But she can't mean—she murdered him. Can she? *(She appeals to FREDA, who is staring hard at OLWEN.)*

(FREDA merely shakes her head and still stares.)

STANTON. You might as well tell us exactly what happened now, Olwen, if you can stand it.

(OLWEN looks up and nods.)

And I might as well tell you—before you begin—that I'm not at all surprised. I suspected it was you at the first.

OLWEN *(staring at him)*. You suspected I'd done it? But why?

STANTON. For three reasons. The first was that I couldn't understand why Martin should shoot himself. You see, I knew he hadn't taken the money, and though he was in every kind of mess, he didn't seem to me the sort of chap who'd get out of it that way.

Then I knew you'd been with him quite late, because—as I said before—I'd been told you'd gone that way. And the third reason—well, that'll keep. You'd better tell us what happened, now. It was an accident, wasn't it?

OLWEN (*in a low strained voice*). Yes, it was really an accident. (*Rising.*) I'll tell you what happened, but I can't go into details. It's all too muddled and horrible. But I'll tell you the complete truth. I won't hide anything more, I promise you. I think we'd all better tell everything we know now, really speak our minds.

ROBERT (*also in a low voice*). I agree.

STANTON. Wait a minute, Olwen. Will you have a drink before you begin?

OLWEN. I'll just have a little soda-water, if you don't mind.

(*OLWEN sways as if about to fall. ROBERT catches her L. arm and holds her. FREDa moves to her R. side. STANTON, who has poured out a drink R., gives it to her.*)

ROBERT. Sit here. (*Indicating the armchair L.O.*)

OLWEN (*to STANTON*). Thank you. (*She sips her drink.—To ROBERT.*) No, I'll sit by the fire. (*She crosses to the stool by the fireplace and sits.*)

(*ROBERT moves L. to above her.*)

I went to see Martin that Saturday night, as you know, to talk to him about the missing money. Mr. Whitehouse had told me about it. He thought that either Martin or Robert must have taken it. I gathered it was more likely Robert. So I went to see Martin. I didn't like Martin and he knew it, but he knew, too, what I felt about Robert, and after all, he was Robert's brother. He believed that Robert had taken the money and he wasn't a bit worried about it. I'm sorry, Robert, but he wasn't. I hated him for that too. He was rather maliciously amused. The good brother fallen at last—that sort of thing.

FREDa (*in a low bitter voice, crossing in front of the armchair L.O. and sitting on the arm facing OLWEN*). I can believe that. I hate to, but I know he could be like that sometimes. He was that day.

OLWEN (*gently*). You found that too, that day?

FREDa. Yes, he was in one of his worst moods. He could be cruel—torturing—sometimes.

OLWEN. I've never seen him as bad as he was that night. He wasn't really sane.

ROBERT (*shocked*). Olwen.

OLWEN (*very gently*). I'm sorry, Robert. (*Putting her hand on his arm.*) I didn't want you to know all this, but there's no help for it now. You see, Martin had been taking some sort of drug—

ROBERT. Drug! Do you mean dope stuff?

OLWEN. Yes. He'd had a lot of it.

ROBERT. Are you sure? I can't believe it.

STANTON (*moving down to the settee and sitting, facing up stage*). It's true, Caplan. I knew it.

GORDON. So did I. He made me try some once, but I didn't like it. It just made me feel rather sick.

ROBERT. When was this?

GORDON. You remember when he went to Berlin and how nervy he was just then?

STANTON. Yes, I remember.

GORDON. Well, a fellow he met there put him on to it—some new drug that a lot of the literary and theatrical set were dopping themselves with—

FREDA. But did Martin—

GORDON. Yes. He liked it and took more and more of it.

ROBERT. But where did he get it?

GORDON. Through some German he knew in town. When he couldn't get it, he was pretty rotten. Not so bad as those dope fiends one reads about, you know, but nevertheless, pretty rotten.

STANTON. But didn't you try to stop him?

GORDON. Of course—but he only laughed. I don't blame him really. None of you can understand what life was like to Martin—he was so sensitive and nervy. He was one of those people who are meant to be happy.

STANTON (*grimly*). We're all those people who are meant to be happy. Martin's no exception.

ROBERT (*who is leaning back against the book-shelves*). Yes, that's true. But I know what Gordon means.

FREDA. You couldn't help knowing what he means, if you knew Martin. There was no sort of middle state, no easy jog-trot with him. Either he had to be gay—and when he was gay, he was gayer than anybody else in the world—or he was intensely miserable.

BETTY (*impulsively*). I'm like that. Everybody is—aren't they?—except old and stuffy people.

ROBERT (*brooding*). But what about this drug, Olwen?

OLWEN. He took some—it was in little white tablets—while I was there, and it had a horrible effect on him. It gave him a sort of devilish gaiety. I can see him now. His eyes were queer. Oh—he really wasn't sane. (*She hesitates.*)

ROBERT. What happened?

OLWEN (*quietly, but very agitated*). It's horrible to talk about. I've tried not to think about it. He knew I disliked him, but he couldn't believe I *really* disliked him. He was frightfully conceited about himself. He seemed to think that everybody young, male or female, ought to be falling in love with him. He saw himself as a sort of Pan, you know.

FREDA (*in a low voice*). Yes, he did. And he'd every reason to.

OLWEN. He began taunting me. He thought of me—or pretended to—as a priggish spinster, full of repressions, who'd never really lived. All rubbish, because I'm really not that type at all.

(ROBERT turns and drifts up to the window.)

But he pretended to think I was, and kept telling me that my dislike of him showed that I was trying to repress a great fascination he had for me. And, of course, that all these repressions were bad for me. I'd never lived, never would live, and all the rest of it. He talked a lot about that. I ought to have run out and left him, but I felt I couldn't while he was in that state. In a way I was sorry for him, because really he was ill, sick in mind and body, and I thought perhaps I could calm him down. I might dislike him, but after all he wasn't a stranger. He was one of our own set, mixed up with most of the people I liked best in the world. (*She rises.*) I tried hard to stop him. But everything I said seemed to make him worse. I suppose it would when he was in that excited abnormal state. Well, he talked about my repressions, and when I pretended to laugh at him, he got more and more excited. And then he tried to show me some beastly foul drawings he had—horrible obscene things by some mad Belgian artist—

FREDA (*rising up and swaying*). Oh—my God—— (*She sobs.*)

OLWEN (*going to her*). Oh, Freda, I'm so sorry. Please forgive me. I know how this must be hurting you.

FREDA (*distracted, and moving up to window*). Martin! Martin!

OLWEN. Don't listen to any more. I'll stop if you like. Or go and lie down.

FREDA. I couldn't. Oh—he wasn't like that really. (*Pulling aside the curtains and opening the window.*) If you'd known him as I'd known him—before.

OLWEN (*moving back to the fireplace*). I know that. We all do. He was different. He was ill.

FREDA (*half turning round and speaking in a muffled tone*). Go on, Olwen.

ROBERT (*behind the armchair l.c.*). Yes, Olwen. You can't stop now.

OLWEN (*leaning on the mantelpiece and facing front*). There isn't a lot to tell now. When I pushed his beastly drawings away and was rather indignant about them, he got still more excited, completely unbalanced, and shouted out things about my repressions. And then I found he was telling me to take my clothes off. I told him not to be a fool and that I was going. But then he stood between me and the door. And he had a revolver in his hand and was shouting something about danger and terror and love. He wasn't threatening me with it or himself. He was just waving it about—being dramatic. I didn't even believe it was loaded. But by this time I'd had more than enough of him—I couldn't be sorry for him any more—and I told him to get out of the way. When he wouldn't, I tried to push him out of the way. And then we had a struggle. (*She is distressed now and a trifle incoherent.*) He tried to tear my clothes. We really fought one another. It was horrible.

He wasn't any stronger than I was. (*Illustrating this by grabbing her own wrist and slowly turning it.*) I'd grabbed the hand with the revolver in it. I'd turned the revolver towards him. His finger must have been on the trigger. I must have given it a jerk. (*She covers her face with her hands.*) The revolver went off. (*She sinks down on to the stool.*) Oh—horrible—horrible! I've tried and tried to forget that. If he'd just been wounded, I'm sure I would have stopped with him—even though I was in such a panic. But he wasn't. He was dead.

ROBERT. Yes, we understand that. You needn't tell us.

OLWEN. When I realized what had happened, I rushed out in a dreadful panic and sat in my car outside for I don't know how long. I couldn't move a finger. There was nobody about. It was fairly late and you know how lonely that cottage was. I just sat on and on in the car, shivering, and it was so quiet in the cottage, so horribly quiet. I've gone through that over and over again. (*She buries her face in her hands and sobs soundlessly.*)

BETTY (*in a whisper and turning her head away*). God!

(*FREDA closes the window and turns round.*)

ROBERT. You can't be blamed, Olwen.

STANTON (*decisively, and rising*). Of course she can't be blamed. (*He moves up stage to above the armchairs and then turns.*) And there must never be a word spoken about this—not to anybody. We must all promise that.

(*They all nod or murmur their assent.*)

OLWEN (*wearily*). Give me a cigarette, Robert.

(*ROBERT takes out his own case and hands it to OLWEN. She selects a cigarette and he lights it.*)

GORDON (*bitterly, rising and crossing to front of piano and taking a cigarette from there*). It's a pity we can't all be as cool and business-like about this as you are, Stanton.

STANTON. I don't feel very cool and business-like about it. But you see, it's not as big a surprise to me as it is to you people. I guessed long ago that something like this had happened.

ROBERT (*moving down to L. end of settee and sitting, facing OLWEN*). But it looked so much like suicide that nobody bothered to suggest it wasn't. It never seemed to me to be anything else. All the evidence pointed that way. I can't think how you could have guessed even though you knew Olwen had been there.

STANTON. I told you I had a third reason. I was over fairly early next morning—the postmistress at Fallows End rang me up—and I was there before anybody but the village constable and the doctor. And I spotted something on the floor that the village bobby had missed, and I picked it up when he wasn't looking. I've

kept it in my pocket-book ever since. (*He brings out a pocket-book and produces from it a small square of patterned silk.*) I'm rather observant about such things.

OLWEN (*rising and moving over to him*). Let me see. (*She examines it.*) Yes, that's a piece of the dress I was wearing. It was torn in the struggle we had. So that's how you knew?

STANTON (*crossing to the fireplace and dropping the piece of cloth into the fire*). That's how I knew. (*He moves back again.*)

OLWEN. But why didn't you say anything?

GORDON (*bitterly, sitting on the piano-stool*). I can tell you that. He didn't say anything because he wanted everybody to think that Martin had shot himself. You see, that meant that Martin must have taken the money.

ROBERT (*wearily*). That's about it, I suppose. It falls into line with everything we've heard from him to-night.

STANTON. No, there happened to be another reason, much more important. I knew that if Olwen had had a hand in Martin's death, then something like that must have happened, and so Olwen couldn't be blamed. I knew her better than any of you—or I felt I did. And I trusted her. She's about the only person I would trust. She knows all about that. I've told her often enough.

(*OLWEN moves to the stool again and sits.*)

She's not interested, but there it is.

OLWEN (*wonderingly*). And you never even hinted to me that you knew.

STANTON. Surprising, isn't it? What a chance I missed to capture your interest for a few minutes. But I couldn't take that line with you. I suppose even nowadays, when we're all so damned tough, there has got to be one person that you behave to always as if you were Sir Roger de Coverly, and with me you've been that person for a long time now. And I knew all along that you were saying nothing because you thought Robert here had taken the money, and that he was safe after everybody put it down to Martin. And that didn't always make it any easier for me.

BETTY. No? What a shame! (*She rises and moves down stage on a level with R. end of settee.*) But what a fine romantic character you are, aren't you?

ROBERT (*gently*). Steady, Betty. You don't understand.

FREDA (*bitterly*). How could she?

BETTY (*indignantly, turning to FREDA*). Why do you say that—in that tone of voice?

FREDA (*wearily*). Why does one say anything—in any tone of voice?

(*BETTY moves up to the bay of the piano and turns over the "Radio Times."*)

OLWEN (*to STANTON*). You know, I nearly did take you into my

confidence. And that might have made a difference. But I chose a bad moment.

STANTON (*eagerly, sitting on the arm of the chair L.C. and facing her*). Why? When was this? Tell me.

OLWEN. I told you I sat in my car that night for some time not able to do anything. But then, when I felt a little better, I felt I had to tell somebody, and you were the nearest person——

(*BETTY slowly turns her head to OLWEN with fear dawning over her face.*)

STANTON (*alarmed, and rising*). But you didn't go there—that night?

(*BETTY drifts down to the end of the piano and listens intently.*)

OLWEN (*quietly*). Yes, I did. I drove over to your cottage at Church Marley that very Saturday night. I got there about eleven o'clock or just afterwards. I left my car at the bottom of that tiny narrow lane and walked up to your cottage. And then—I walked back again.

(*BETTY, very much alarmed, and looking very frightened, sways and puts her hand on the piano for support. She almost cries out, but catching GORDON'S eye she checks herself and tries to appear at ease by smiling at him, then quickly looks away. GORDON watches her with a suspicious look.*)

STANTON. You walked up to the cottage?

OLWEN. Yes, yes—don't be stupid about it, please, Stanton. I walked right up to your cottage and saw enough to set me walking straight back again.

(*BETTY turns and moves up to the bay of the piano again. FREDa watches her and a slow smile comes over her face. GORDON also watches her as she moves up.*)

STANTON. So that's when you came. After that, it was hopeless, I suppose?

OLWEN. Quite hopeless. I think that added the last touch to that night. I don't think I've ever felt the same about people—not just here, but everybody, even the people who walk into the office or sit opposite one in buses and trains—since that night. I know that's stupid, but I couldn't help it. And (*forcing a smile*) you must all have noticed that I've been completely off country cottages.

FREDa (*maliciously*). Yes, even Betty's noticed that.

(*BETTY bursts into tears and hangs her head.*)

ROBERT (*rising*). Why, what's the matter, Betty?

GORDON. What a little liar you are, Betty.

BETTY (*in a muffled voice*). Haven't we all been liars?

ROBERT (*puzzled, and moving to R. of table C.*). But you haven't, Betty.

GORDON. Oh, don't be a fool, Robert. Of course she has. She's lied like fury.

ROBERT. What about?

FREDA. Why don't you ask her?

OLWEN (*wearily*). Oh, what does it matter? Leave the child alone.

BETTY. I'm not a child. That's the mistake you've all made.

ROBERT (*who has been thinking, moving up to L. of BETTY*). Not you—and Stanton? (*There is a pause. She does not reply.*) Is that what they mean?

(*BETTY just keeps still and looks defiant.*)

Why don't you tell them it's ridiculous?

(*BETTY is just going to speak, when FREDA says:*)

FREDA (*contemptuously*). How can she? Don't be absurd.

OLWEN (*gently*). You see, Robert, I saw them both in Stanton's cottage that night.

ROBERT (*turning to OLWEN*). I'm sorry, Olwen, but I won't take even your word for this. Besides, there are other possible explanations.

STANTON (*moving in to the table*). Oh, drop this, Caplan. We've had too much of it already. I'm going.

ROBERT (*ferociously, turning on him*). You're not going.

STANTON. Don't be a fool. It's no business of yours.

FREDA (*maliciously*). That's where you're wrong, Stanton. This is where Robert's business really begins.

ROBERT (*turning to BETTY and taking no notice of FREDA*). I'm waiting for an answer, Betty.

BETTY (*frightened*). What do you want me to say?

ROBERT. Were you with Stanton at his cottage?

BETTY (*whispering*). Yes.

ROBERT. Were you his mistress?

BETTY. Yes. (*She turns away and drops her head.*)

ROBERT (*quietly, but with great passion. Turning to STANTON*). My God, I could—

(*There is a pause, as he turns slowly back to BETTY.*)

(*In extreme agitation.*) But why—why—in God's name—why? How could you? How could you?

BETTY (*suddenly stung into life*). How could I? Because I'm not a child, and I'm not a little stuffed doll, that's why. You would drag all this out and now you can damned well have it. Yes, I stayed with Stanton that night, and I've stayed with him other nights. And he's not in love with me and I know it, and I'm not in love with him. I wouldn't marry him if I could. But I'd got to

make something happen. Gordon was driving me mad. If you want to call someone a child, then call him one, for that's all he is. This damned marriage of ours that you all got so sentimental about is the biggest sham there's ever been. It isn't a marriage at all. It's just nothing—pretence, pretence, pretence. Betty darling and Gordon darling, when all the time he's mooning over his Martin and the very sight of him makes me want to scream. (*Her voice has now become a shriek.*)

FREDA. Betty, you mustn't go—

BETTY. It's not my fault. I was in love with him when we were married and I thought everything was going to be marvellous. I wouldn't have looked at anybody else if he'd been—real. But he just isn't there. He can't even *talk* to me.

GORDON (*rising and leaning over the keyboard*). For God's sake, shut up, Betty.

BETTY (*striking the top of the piano*). I won't shut up. They want to know the truth and they can have it. I don't care. I've had nothing, nothing out of my marriage but shame and misery.

OLWEN. Betty, that's simply nonsense.

BETTY. If I were the nice little doll you all thought me, perhaps it wouldn't have mattered. But I'm not. I'm not a child either. I'm a woman. And Stanton was the one person who guessed what was happening and treated me like a woman.

GORDON. I wouldn't have blamed you if you'd gone and fallen in love properly with someone, but this was just a low sordid intrigue, a dirty little affair, not worth all your silly lies. I suppose Stanton was the rich uncle in America who kept giving you all those fine presents?

BETTY. Yes, he was. You couldn't even be generous, though you'd have given your precious Martin everything we'd got. I knew Stanton didn't really care for me, so I got what I could out of him.

(STANTON turns to her and gives an amused grin mixed with surprise.)

It served you right. Men who say they're in love with one woman and keep spending their week-ends with another deserve all they get. (*She turns away and moves up stage.*)

(STANTON half turns his head to OLWEN to see how she takes this.)

(OLWEN turns her head to the fireplace.)

FREDA (*to STANTON, rising and moving to below the step of window*). Is that why you suddenly found yourself so short of money that you had to have that five hundred pounds?

STANTON. Yes. Queer how it works out, isn't it?

GORDON. Then Betty is responsible for everything, for all this misery, for Martin.

BETTY (*turning round to them*). You see! Always Martin.

(*She moves down to the bay of the piano again.*) If I was responsible for all that, then it's your fault really, Gordon. Because you're responsible for everything that happened to me. You ought never to have married me.

GORDON. I didn't know. It was a mistake. (*He sits on the piano-stool.*)

FREDA (*bitterly*). We seem to make that kind of mistake in our family.

(*ROBERT goes to the table up R. and pours himself out a stiff drink.*)

BETTY (*moving down to the end of the piano*). I ought to have left you long before this. That was my mistake—staying on—trying to make the best of it—pretending to be married to somebody who wasn't there, simply dead. (*She sits in the chair below L. of piano.*)

GORDON. Yes, I think I am dead. I think I died last summer. Olwen shot me.

STANTON (*contemptuously*). Ouch!

OLWEN. Gordon, I think that's unfair and also rather stupid and affected.

GORDON (*quietly*). It may have sounded like that, but it wasn't. I meant it, Olwen.

ROBERT (*after drinking half a glass of neat whisky and coming down level with BETTY*). I began this, didn't I? Well, I'll finish it. I'll say something now. Betty, I worshipped you. I suppose you knew that?

FREDA. If she didn't, she must have been very dense.

(*ROBERT turns on FREDA. He is not drunk, but speaks in a thick voice and is a trifle wild in manner.*)

ROBERT. I'm talking to Betty now. You might leave us alone for a minute.

(*FREDA swings round and faces the window.*)

(*Turning to BETTY.*) Did you realize that I felt like that, Betty?

BETTY. Yes. But I didn't care very much.

ROBERT (*bitterly*). No, why should you?

BETTY. No, it isn't that. But I knew you weren't in love with me. You didn't know me. You were only worshipping somebody you'd invented, who looked like me. And that's not the same thing at all.

ROBERT (*to BETTY*). I didn't do much about it. I couldn't, you see. I thought that you and Gordon were reasonably happy together—

BETTY. Yes, we put up a good show, didn't we?

ROBERT. You did. (*He goes up to the table for another drink.*)

GORDON. Yes, we did. What would have happened if we'd gone on pretending like hell to be happy together.

BETTY. Nothing.

GORDON. No. If we'd gone on pretending long enough, I believe we might have *been* happy together, sometimes. It often works out like that.

BETTY. Never.

OLWEN. Yes it does. That's why all this is so wrong really. The *real* truth is something so deep you can't get at it this way, and all this half-truth does is to blow everything up. It isn't *civilized*.

STANTON. I agree.

ROBERT (*cynically, standing behind the armchair R.C.*). You agree. You might as well.

STANTON. You'll get no sympathy from me, Caplan.

ROBERT. Sympathy from you. (*Moving to C.*) I never want to set eyes on you again, Stanton. You're a thief, a cheat, a liar, and a dirty, cheap seducer.

STANTON (*after a tiny pause*). And you're a fool, Caplan. You look solid, but you're not. You've a good deal in common with that cracked brother of yours. You won't face up to real things. You've been living in a fool's paradise, and now, having got yourself out of it by to-night's efforts—all your doing—you're busy building yourself a fool's hell to live in.

ROBERT (*crossing to the piano and picking up the glass that STANTON has left there*). I think this was your glass, Stanton. (*He goes up to window and throws it out.*) And now take yourself after it. Get out. (*He crosses to the table up R. and pours out another drink.*)

STANTON (*moving to OLWEN*). Good night, Olwen. I'm sorry about all this.

OLWEN. So am I. (*She offers him her hand. He takes it.*) Good night.

STANTON. Good night, Freda.

FREDA. Good night, Charles.

(*STANTON crosses to the door and turns on the top step.*)

STANTON (*to BETTY and GORDON*). I suppose you're coming along?

GORDON. Not with you, I'm afraid. And don't forget, Stanton, you owe the firm five hundred pounds—and a resignation.

STANTON. Oh, you're going to take it that way, are you?

GORDON. Yes, I'm going to take it that way.

STANTON. You'll regret it. Good night. (*With ironical politeness.*) No, don't trouble. I can find my way out.

(*He exits.*)

(*FREDA moves to C. of stage. GORDON rises impatiently, looks after STANTON, then crosses above the settee to L. of it. ROBERT pours out another drink.*)

OLWEN. Don't be too hasty, Gordon. Whatever his faults, Stanton's a first-class man at his job. If he goes, the firm will suffer,

GORDON. I can't help it. I couldn't work with him after this. The firm will have to suffer, that's all.

ROBERT. Don't worry. It's not a case of the firm suffering. The firm's smashed to hell now.

FREDA. Nonsense. *(She turns back up stage, shuts the window and draws the curtains.)*

ROBERT. Is it? I don't think so.

GORDON *(bitterly, and to BETTY as he crosses slowly to the door)*. Well, Betty darling, I think we'd better return to our happy little home, our dear little nest—

BETTY *(rising)*. Oh, don't, Gordon. *(She moves over to above the settee and picks up her fur coat.)*

FREDA *(making a move to the door)*. I'll let you out.

(She goes out.)

(ROBERT has moved down to R. of BETTY. He still has a drink in his hand.)

ROBERT *(as BETTY turns to move off)*. Good-bye. *(Staring at her.)*

BETTY. Good— Why do you look like that?

ROBERT. I'm not saying good-bye to you. I don't know you. I never did, it seems. I'm saying good-bye to this. *(He indicates her face and body.)* That's all. *(He turns away abruptly, and goes up for another drink.)*

(BETTY stares for a second and then goes quickly out.)

(OLWEN, as soon as she has gone, rises and crosses to L. of ROBERT.)

OLWEN *(distressed)*. Robert, please don't drink any more to-night. I know how you feel, but it'll only make you worse—really, it will.

ROBERT. What does it matter? I'm through, anyway.

OLWEN. Robert, I can't bear seeing you like this. You don't know how it hurts me.

ROBERT. I'm sorry, Olwen, I really am sorry. You're the only one who's really come out of this. I know that. Strange, isn't it—that you should have been feeling like that about me all the time?

OLWEN. Yes, all the time. *(She crosses in front of him to the piano and leans on it with her back to him.)*

ROBERT. I'm sorry.

OLWEN *(turning the leaves of the "Radio Times")*. I'm not. I mean about myself. I suppose I ought to be, but I'm not. It's hurt like anything sometimes, but it's kept me going too.

ROBERT. I know. *(He moves down to the armchair R.C. and sits.)* And you see, now I've stopped going. Something's broken—inside.

OLWEN. It won't seem bad to-morrow. It never does.

ROBERT. All this isn't going to seem any better to-morrow, Olwen.

OLWEN (*leaning against the piano, watching him*). Freda will help too. After all, Robert, she's fond of you.

ROBERT. No, not really. It isn't that she dislikes me steadily, but every now and then she hates me—and now I see why, of course. She hates me because I'm Robert Caplan and not Martin, because he's dead and I'm alive.

OLWEN (*crossing to his chair and kneeling at the r. side of it*). She may feel differently—after to-night.

ROBERT. She may. I doubt it. She doesn't change easily—that's the trouble. And then again, you see, I don't care any more. That's the point. Whether she changes or doesn't change I don't care now.

OLWEN. And you know there's nothing I wouldn't do, Robert. I'll—(*she gives a little laugh*)—I'll run away this very minute with you if you like.

ROBERT. I'm terribly grateful, Olwen. But nothing happens here—inside. That's the damned awful cruel thing. Nothing happens. All hollow, empty.

(*FREDA enters and shuts the door after her.*)

FREDA (*on the top step*). I'm sure it's not at all the proper thing to say at such a moment, but the fact remains that I feel rather hungry. (*Moving down the steps to the front of the piano.*) What about you, Olwen?

(*OLWEN rises, moves down to the l. end of the settee and sits, facing ROBERT.*)

You, Robert? Or have you been drinking too much?

ROBERT. Yes, I've been drinking too much.

FREDA (*moving up to behind his chair*). Well, it's very silly of you. (*She takes his glass and puts it on the table up r.*)

ROBERT (*wearily*). Yes. (*He buries his face in his hands.*)

FREDA (*moving to behind his chair*). And you did ask for all this.

ROBERT (*half looking up*). I asked for it. And I got it.

FREDA (*crossing to the armchair l.c. and sitting*). Though I doubt if you minded very much until it came to Betty.

ROBERT. That's not true. But I can understand you're thinking so. You see, as more and more of this rotten stuff came out, so more and more I came to depend on my secret thoughts of Betty—as someone who seemed to me to represent some lovely quality of life.

FREDA. I've known some time, of course, that you were getting very sentimental and noble about her. And I've known some time, too, all about Betty, and I've often thought of telling you.

ROBERT. I'm not sorry you didn't.

FREDA. You ought to be.

ROBERT. Why?

FREDA. That kind of self-deception's rather stupid.

ROBERT. What about you and Martin?

FREDA. I didn't deceive myself. I know everything—or nearly everything—about him. I wasn't in love with somebody who really wasn't there, somebody I'd made up.

ROBERT. I think you were. Probably we always are.

OLWEN. Then it's not so bad then. You can always build up another image for yourself to fall in love with.

ROBERT. No, you can't. That's the trouble. You lose the capacity for building. You run short of the stuff that creates beautiful illusions, just as if a gland had stopped working.

OLWEN. Then you have to learn to live without illusions.

ROBERT (*rising*). Can't be done. (*He moves up R.C.*) Not for us. We started life too early for that. Possibly they're breeding people now who can live without illusions. I hope so. But I can't do it. I've lived among illusions——

FREDA (*grimly*). You have.

ROBERT (*with growing excitement*). Well, what if I have? They've given me hope and courage. They've helped me to live. I suppose we ought to get all that from faith in life. But I haven't got any. No religion or anything. Just this damned farmyard to live in. That's all. And just a few bloody glands and secretions and nerves to do it with. But it didn't look too bad. I'd my little illusions, you see.

FREDA (*bitterly*). Then why didn't you leave them alone, instead of clamouring for the truth all night like a fool?

ROBERT (*terribly excited now, and moving to FREDA*). Because I am a fool. Stanton was right. That's the only answer. I had to meddle, like a child with a fire. (*He moves down R.*) I began this evening with something to keep me going. I'd good memories of Martin. I'd a wife who didn't love me but at least seemed too good for me. I'd two partners I liked and respected. There was a girl I could idealize. And now——

OLWEN (*distressed, rising quickly and moving up to FREDA*). No, Robert—please. We know.

ROBERT (*in a frenzy*). But you don't know, you *can't* know—not as I know—or you wouldn't stand there like that, as if we'd only just had some damned silly little squabble about a hand at bridge.

OLWEN. Freda, can't you——

ROBERT. Don't you see, we're not living in the same *world* now. Everything's gone. My brother was an obscene lunatic——

FREDA (*very sharply, rising*). Stop that.

ROBERT (*taking a step to FREDA*). And my wife doted on him and pestered him.

(*FREDA turns away and goes up to the window.*)

One of my partners is a liar and a cheat and a thief. The other—God knows what he is—some sort of hysterical young pervert——

(Both women try to check and calm him.)

And the girl's a greedy little cat on the tiles—— *(He moves down to the end of the piano.)*

OLWEN *(half screaming)*. No, Robert, no. This is horrible, mad. Please, please don't go on. *(Quieter.)* It won't seem like this to-morrow.

ROBERT *(crazy now)*. To-morrow. To-morrow. I tell you, I'm through. I'm through. There can't be a to-morrow.

(He turns and rushes out.)

FREDA *(screaming, moving down to OLWEN and gripping her arm)*. He's got a revolver in his bedroom.

OLWEN *(screaming and running to the door)*. Stop, Robert! Stop! Stop!

**(There is a three-seconds fade out to a BLACK OUT. Then there is a revolver-shot, a woman's scream, a moment's silence, then the sound of a woman sobbing, exactly as at the beginning of Act I.)*

OLWEN. It can't happen—it shan't happen.

(In the BLACK OUT the four women take their places in exactly the same positions as they were at the beginning of the play. In the dark MISS MOCKRIDGE is heard to say quietly: "Da da da. Da da da, DA. Da da da. Da da da, DA." Giving the effect of a cross-fade from the radio to reality.)

MISS MOCKRIDGE. How many scenes did we miss?

(The lights come up very slowly as she speaks.)

OLWEN. Five, I think.

(FREDA crosses to the radio and switches it off.)

MISS MOCKRIDGE. I suppose they must have been telling a lot of lies in those scenes. That's why that man was so angry—the husband, I mean.

(There is a subdued burst of laughter from the men in the dining-room.)

BETTY. Listen to the men.

(FREDA crosses to the stool at the fireplace.)

MISS MOCKRIDGE. They're probably laughing at something very improper.

BETTY. No, just gossip. Men gossip like anything.

FREDA. Of course they do. And they've got a marvellous excuse now that they're all three directors of the firm.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. What a snug little group you are.

FREDA *(making a face)*. Snug little group. It sounds disgusting.

OLWEN. Enchanting. I hate to leave it.

* See Author's Note on page 4.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. I should think you do. It must be so comforting to be all so settled.

BETTY. Pretty good.

MISS MOCKRIDGE (*to FREDa*). But I suppose you all miss your brother-in-law. He used to be down here with you too, didn't he?

FREDa. You mean Robert's brother, Martin?

(OLWEN, BETTY and FREDa exchange glances.)

(*There is a pause.*)

MISS MOCKRIDGE. I say, have I dropped a brick? I always am dropping bricks.

FREDa (*very quietly*). No, not at all. It was very distressing at the time, but it's all right now. Martin shot himself.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Oh yes—dreadful business, of course. He was very handsome, wasn't he?

(*Enter STANTON, who crosses to the fireplace. He is followed by GORDON, who goes and sits at R. end of the settee and takes BETTY's hand.*)

OLWEN. Yes, very handsome.

STANTON (*with jovial condescension*). Who's very handsome? May we know?

BETTY. Not you, Charles.

GORDON. They were talking about me. Betty, why do you allow them to talk about your husband in this fulsome fashion? Have you no shame, girl?

BETTY (*squeezing his hand*). Darling, I'm sure you've had too much manly gossip and old brandy.

(ROBERT enters, switches on the light at the doorway and moves to R. of MISS MOCKRIDGE.)

ROBERT. Sorry to be so late, Freda—but it's that wretched puppy of yours.

FREDa. Oh, what's he been doing now?

ROBERT. He was trying to eat the script of Sonia William's new novel. I was afraid it might make him sick. You see, Miss Mockridge, how we talk of you novelists.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Yes, I hear you. I've just been saying what a charming cosy little group you've made here. I think you've been lucky.

STANTON. It's not all luck, Miss Mockridge. You see, we all happen to be nice easy-going people.

ROBERT (*moving down to R. end of the settee*). Except Betty, she's terribly wild.

STANTON. That's only because Gordon doesn't beat her often enough—yet.

(GORDON rises and goes up R. to the radio.)

MISS MOCKRIDGE. You see, Miss Peel, Mr. Stanton is still the cynical bachelor; I'm afraid he rather spoils the picture.

GORDON (*beginning to fiddle with the wireless set*). What's disturbing the ether, to-night? Anybody know?

FREDA. Oh, Gordon, don't start it again. We've only just turned it off.

GORDON. What did you hear?

FREDA. The last half of a play.

OLWEN. It was called "The Sleeping Dog."

STANTON. Why?

MISS MOCKRIDGE. We're not sure, but it ends with a gentleman shooting himself.

STANTON. What fun they have at the B.B.C.

FREDA. Yes. Shots and things.

OLWEN (*rising, moving up to the armchair L.O. and sitting on the l. arm*). I think I understand that play now. The sleeping dog was the truth, do you see, and that man, the husband, insisted upon disturbing it.

ROBERT. He was quite right to disturb it. (*He sits on the settee R. of BETTY.*)

STANTON. Was he, I wonder. I think telling the truth is about as healthy as skidding at sixty round a corner.

FREDA. And life's got lots of dangerous corners, hasn't it, Charles?

STANTON. It can have if you don't choose your route well.

FREDA (*nonchalantly*). Let's talk about something else. Who wants a drink? (*Rising and crossing to the table up R.*) Drinks, Robert, and cigarettes.

ROBERT (*rising and examining the box on the table O.*) There aren't any here. (*He crosses to the piano for the cigarette-box.*)

FREDA. There are some in this one. (*She comes forward to O. with the musical cigarette-box, which she is careful to keep closed.*) Miss Mockridge, Olwen, a cigarette? (*She offers the closed box to them.*)

OLWEN (*looking at the box*). Oh, I remember that box. It plays a tune at you, doesn't it? I remember the tune. Yes, it's the Wedding March. (*She opens the box, and it plays.*)

(GORDON, who has been fiddling with the radio, suddenly says:)

GORDON. Wait a minute. Listen to this.

(*A well-known dance tune gradually fades in on the wireless set.*)

BETTY (*rising*). Oh, I adore that tune.

STANTON. What is it?

(BETTY tells him the name of the tune.)

MISS MOCKRIDGE. What? (*She rises.*)

(GORDON repeats the name for MISS MOCKRIDGE's benefit.)

(On this ROBERT pulls back the chair that MISS MOCKRIDGE has been sitting in. FREDa moves the table c. back to the window. MISS MOCKRIDGE crosses to the stool at the fireplace and sits. FREDa comes and offers her a chocolate, then stands above her. STANTON asks MISS MOCKRIDGE to dance. She declines. OLWEN crosses to ROBERT, and BETTY gets hold of GORDON. They commence to dance. The CURTAIN descends on them dancing. It rises again and they are still dancing. STANTON has now taken FREDa for his partner.)

CURTAIN.

FURNITURE AND PROPERTY PLOT

Side-table down L. with small bowl of mixed flowers, glass-case puzzle, ash-tray and match-stand with matches.

Armchair L.

Fireplace and mantelpiece L. with bronze statuette, ash-tray and matches.

Upholstered stool in front of fireplace.

Gate-logged table up L. with table-lamp, large tall vase of mixed flowers and various periodicals.

Window-seat and squab up C.

Armchair up L.C.

Armchair up R.C.

Small round table C. with cigarette-box, 2 cigarettes in it, box of chocolates, ash-tray, match-stand and matches.

Low settee down C.

Large round table up R. with radio set; tray with whisky decanter, syphon of soda, six tumblers and a glass jug of water. Musical cigarette-box.

Piano R. with table-lamp, vase of tall mixed flowers, copy of "Radio Times," cigarette-box, ash-tray and matches.

Piano-stool below piano.

Light chair with arms below L. of piano.

Small table with telephone in hall, just L. of the doorway.

Curtains with pelmet on wall down L.

Oil-painting above fireplace.

Lamp brackets above fireplace.

Inner curtains with pelmet up C.

Curtains on rod to slide in window up C.

Oil-painting above piano.

Bookshelves filled with books, built into the walls up L. and up R.

One or two loose books for OLWEN in the shelf up L.

Hand properties.

Long cigarette-holder for MISS MOCKRIDGE.

Cigarette-case for ROBERT.

Cigarette-case for GORDON.

Cigarette-case for STANTON.

Pocket-book with small piece of dress material for STANTON.

Noise effects off R.

Revolver-shots.

Door-bell.

Radio-gramophone to play a popular dance tune through the dummy wireless up R.

LIGHTING PLOT

Pink and amber floats.

9 1,000-watt spots, numbered from L. to R., hanging above ceiling batten.

2 two-light electric brackets with shades over mantelpiece.

1 one-light glass standard with shade on table up L.

1 30-watt lamp behind pelmet in C. of window.

1 one-light glass standard with shade on piano R.

1 electric fire in fireplace L.

In Hall.

1 pink 30-watt lamp fixed over C., and other side of door R.

4 pink lamps in a strip L., other side of door R.

The above is really the essential lighting for the Hall. If a larger Hall is used, or a front door shown, then more would be required.

ACT I

To open.—Everything blacked out.

When FREDA switches on the lights at the mantelpiece, bring up together:

Spots 1, 2 and 7.

Table-lamp up L.

Two-light brackets over mantelpiece.

Lamp inside pelmet in window up C.

R. end section of floats (pink).

All lamps in Hall.

When FREDA switches on the piano-lamp, bring up together:

Piano-lamp.

Spots 3 and 6.

C. section of floats $\frac{1}{2}$ up (pink and amber).

When ROBERT switches on the lights at the door, bring up together:

Spots 4, 5, 8 and 9.

Floats to full.

When he switches them out, switch off together:

Spots 4, 5, 8 and 9.

R. end section of floats.

When he turns out the piano-lamp, switch off together:

Piano-lamp.

C. section of floats.

When he switches on the lights at the door, bring up together:

Spots 4, 5, 8 and 9

C. section of floats.

ACT II

To open.

Spots 1, 2 and 7.

Table-lamp up L.

Lamp inside pelmet in window up C.

Two-light brackets over mantelpiece.

L. and section of floats (pink).

All lamps in Hall.

When ROBERT switches on the lights at the door, bring up together :

Spots 4, 5, 8 and 9.

c. section of floats.

When FREDa switches on the piano-lamp, bring up together :

Spots 3 and 6.

Piano-lamp.

ACT III

To open.—Everything full up.

When OWEN screams "Stop! Stop!" check everything out in three seconds.

Then later bring up slowly and all together :

Spots 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7.

Table-lamp up L.

Lamp inside pelmet in window up c.

Two-light brackets over mantelpiece.

L. and c. section of floats.

All lights in Hall.

When ROBERT switches on the lights at the door, bring up together :

Spots 4, 5, 8 and 9.

Floats to full.

DANGEROUS CORNER

*The following version was played in the American
production of the play*

ACT I

(The four women discovered sitting and talking.)

MISS MOCKRIDGE (to OLWEN). And what do you say this novel is called?

OLWEN. "The Sleeping Dog."

MISS MOCKRIDGE. "The Sleeping Dog." I must remember that. When will you publish it?

OLWEN. Next autumn, I suppose.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. I must look out for it.

OLWEN. We'll send you a copy. If you're in New York when it comes out, I'll give you a ring about it.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Oh, of course, you're in New York now.

OLWEN. Yes, I'm back in the New York office now. Though I still come down here as often as I can.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. You people make such an intimate little group that you confuse me. I can't make out who's here, and who's in New York.

FREDA. It's very simple. It's so arranged now that the married ones are here—my brother Gordon and Betty are here, and Robert and I are here—and the two single ones, Olwen and Stanton, are in the New York office.

OLWEN. And come back here every time there's the smallest excuse. Only I haven't the luck to have as many excuses as Charles Stanton has. But I do my best.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. I'm sure you do. So would I. (To OLWEN.) Miss Peel, I think you ought to marry Mr. Stanton. (To the other two.) Don't you think she ought to marry Mr. Stanton?

OLWEN (amused). Oh? Why should I?

BETTY. I didn't know you were a match-maker, Miss Mockridge.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. I'm not. In the ordinary way, I consider it a disgusting business. But I like things to be symmetrical. I like a neat pattern. And you see, if you married Mr. Stanton, that would complete the pattern here. Then you'd have your three directors, and also three pairs of adoring husbands and wives.

FREDA. I must say the adoring husbands don't seem in a hurry to join their wives to-night.

BETTY. No, they are pigs. What's keeping them?

FREDA. Well, I think I know one thing that's keeping them. Robert has just acquired some old brandy that he's terribly proud of, and I suppose they're sampling that.

(Subdued burst of laughter from men off.)

BETTY. Listen. I heard them laughing then.

MISS MOCKRIDGE *(with mock primness)*. They're probably laughing at something very improper.

BETTY. No, I know them. It's just gossip. Men gossip like anything.

FREDA. Of course they do.

OLWEN. Well, why shouldn't they?

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Exactly, why shouldn't they? People who don't like gossip aren't interested in their fellow creatures. So I insist upon my three publishers gossiping.

BETTY. Yes, but they always pretend it's business. I don't mind Gordon sitting there drinking Robert's old brandy—though I know he'll have a liver to-morrow morning—and I don't mind him gossiping. But I do object to him coming in soon—as he will, you'll see—looking very important and pretending he's been exploring all the secrets of the publishing business.

FREDA *(laughing)*. Well, Betty, you may know Gordon better than I do, but even if he is your husband, he's my brother and I've known him a long time, and he's bound to look important now and again about *something* rather absurd.

MISS MOCKRIDGE *(to FREDA)*. I hope you don't mean by that, Mrs. Caplan, that you think the publishing business absurd. As a woman who gets her living through it, I protest.

OLWEN *(amused)*. And as another woman who also gets her living by it—though in a humbler capacity—I also protest.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Meanwhile, I'm almost prepared to marry Mr. Stanton myself to be one of your charmed circle here. What a snug little group you are!

FREDA. Are we?

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Well, aren't you?

FREDA *(with a laugh)*. Snug little group! How awful.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Not awful at all. I think it's charming.

FREDA *(smiling)*. It sounds disgusting.

BETTY. Yes. Like Dickens or a Christmas card.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. And very nice things to be like, too, let me tell you. In these days almost too good to be true.

FREDA *(apparently amused)*. Oh, why should it be?

OLWEN. I didn't know you were such a pessimist, Miss Mockridge.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Didn't you? Then you don't read the reviews

of my books—and you ought to, you know, being an employee of my publishers. I shall complain of that to my three directors when they come in. (*Gives a slight laugh.*) Certainly I'm a pessimist. I'm an intelligent woman. But I didn't mean in that way, of course. I think it's wonderful here.

FREDA. It is rather nice here. We've been lucky.

OLWEN. It's enchanting. I hate to leave it.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. I'm sure you do. So would I. It must be so comforting to be all so settled.

BETTY. Pretty good. Quite the cosy little nest. Oh!—(*To FREDA, with change of tone.*) Talking about nests, what about that famous white bird you promised to show us—you know, the one that comes into the garden here now, nearly every fine night?

FREDA. I'd forgotten. There should be just time to get a glimpse of it before the men come in. That is, if it's condescending to visit us to-night. (*To MISS MOCKRIDGE.*) Do you mind?

MISS MOCKRIDGE. No, of course not. But why should I?

FREDA. Well, the point is, we'll have to switch the lights off and stare out of the window. Otherwise we shan't see it.

OLWEN. What does it look like?

FREDA. I suppose it's a white owl. But it looks like the ghost of a bird. And this is about its time. (*Goes to window and draws curtains. The other three get up and stand near window, ready to look out.*)

BETTY. I can't see anything at all yet.

FREDA. No, you've got to have the lights out.

(*FREDA switches off the lights, and the stage is in complete darkness. After a moment's pause, there is the sound of a revolver-shot off stage L. BETTY gives a sharp little scream. OLWEN and FREDA cry, "Robert, Robert," then FREDA switches on the lights and the four women are discovered at the window, but facing away from it. FREDA hurries to the door, and the others come forward a pace or two.*)

(*Opening door and calling through.*) Robert, what was that?

ROBERT'S VOICE (*off*). Sorry. We were only fooling. I was showing them my revolver and tried a shot through the window at a flower-pot. We're coming in now.

FREDA (*crossly*). I should think you are. Hurry up and stop being crazy. (*Turns back into room.*) It was nothing. Only those great babies firing Robert's revolver out of the window.

BETTY. You ought to take it away from him. They nearly frightened me out of my life.

FREDA (*drawing curtains*). Well, we've no hope of seeing our ghost bird now. If he was there, he must have cleared out pretty quickly.

OLWEN. Perhaps it will come back later.

FREDA. What time is it now? Ten. No, it won't. I've never caught sight of it much after ten.

MISS MOCKRIDGE (*settling herself, to FREDA*). I suppose you all miss your brother-in-law. He used to be down here with you too, didn't he?

FREDA (*not comfortable*). You mean Robert's brother, Martin?

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Yes, Martin Caplan.

FREDA (*quietly*). What made you think of Martin just then?

MISS MOCKRIDGE (*rather embarrassed*). Well, I don't know quite. He just came into my head, I suppose—

FREDA. It must have been the shot.

MISS MOCKRIDGE (*looking from one to the other*). Oh, surely not. I was in Europe at the time and never quite understood what happened. Something rather dreadful, wasn't it? I'm sorry if I—

FREDA (*sitting, quietly*). No, it's all right. It was very distressing for us at the time, but it's done with now. Martin shot himself. It happened a year ago—last June in fact—not here, but at Fallows End, about twenty miles away. He'd taken a cottage there.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Oh yes. Dreadful business, of course. I only met him twice, I think. I remember I thought him very amusing and charming. He was very handsome, wasn't he?

(*Enter STANTON and GORDON.*)

OLWEN. Yes, very handsome.

STANTON (*with jovial condescension*). Who's very handsome?

FREDA. Not you, Charles.

STANTON. May we know, or is it some grand secret between you?

GORDON (*who has taken BETTY's hand*). They must have been talking about me. Betty, why do you allow them to talk about your husband in this fulsome fashion? Have you no shame, girl?

(*Some ad lib. talk here.*)

BETTY (*holding GORDON's hand*). Darling, I'm sure you've had too much manly gossip and old brandy. You're beginning to look purple in the face and bloated—a typical financier.

(*Enter ROBERT, switching on extra light as he enters.*)

ROBERT. Sorry about that gun, Freda. It was stupid. I hope it didn't frighten anybody.

FREDA. As a matter of fact, it did. All of us.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Yes, and I'd just been saying what a charming cosy little group you've made here, all of you.

ROBERT (*politely*). I'm glad you think so.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. I think you've all been lucky.

ROBERT. I agree, we have.

STANTON. It's not all luck, Miss Mockridge. You see, we all happen to be nice easy-going people.

ROBERT (*smiling at her*). Except Betty—she's terribly wild.

STANTON. That's only because Gordon doesn't beat her often enough—yet.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. You see, Miss Peel, Mr. Stanton is still the cynical bachelor. I'm afraid he rather spoils the picture.

STANTON. Oh—you must have a little dark relief.

GORDON (*beginning to fiddle with radio*). What's disturbing the ether to-night? Any dance music?

ROBERT. I hope not. Let's be quiet. What have you people been talking about?

FREDA. Olwen has been telling us about "The Sleeping Dog."

ROBERT. "The Sleeping Dog"? Oh—that novel we're going to publish, the one she's so keen on.

STANTON (*who is playing with a puzzle*). Why does he call it "The Sleeping Dog"?

OLWEN. Don't you know the proverb—Let sleeping dogs lie?

STANTON. Where does that come into it?

FREDA. From what Olwen says, the sleeping dog seems to be truth.

OLWEN. Yes, and the chief character—the husband—insisted upon disturbing it.

ROBERT. Well, he was quite right to disturb it.

STANTON. Was he? I wonder. I think it a very sound idea—the truth as a sleeping dog.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. But, of course, we do spend too much of our time telling lies and acting them.

BETTY. Oh, but one has to. I'm always fibbing. I do it all day long.

GORDON (*still at radio*). You do, darling. You do.

BETTY. It's the secret of my charm.

MISS MOCKRIDGE. Very likely. But we meant something much more serious.

ROBERT. Serious or not, I'm all for it coming out. It's healthy.

STANTON. I think telling the truth's about as healthy as striking matches in a gunpowder factory. What do you think, Olwen? You're looking terribly wise.

Etc. etc. etc.

End of Act III. From Black Out.

(FREDa switches off the lights, and the stage is in complete darkness.

After a moment's pause, there is the sound of a revolver-shot off stage

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OLWEN. I agree with you. I think telling everything is dangerous. What most people mean by truth is only half the *real* truth. It's dangerous stuff.

FREDA (*nonchalantly*). Well, let's talk about something else. Who wants a drink? Drinks, Robert. And cigarettes. (*Rising and moving to table near window.*)

ROBERT (*rising and examining box on c. table*). There aren't any here. (*Crossing to piano for cigarette-box.*)

FREDA. There are some in this one. (*Coming forward to c. with musical cigarette-box, which she is careful to keep closed.*) Miss Mockridge, Olwen, a cigarette? (*Offers closed box to them.*)

OLWEN (*looking at the box*). Oh, I remember that box. It plays a tune at you, doesn't it? I remember the tune. Yes, it's the Wedding March. (*Opens box, and it plays.*)

GORDON (*who has been fiddling with the radio, suddenly says* :) Wait a minute. Listen to this.

(*"Can't We Talk It Over" gradually fades in on the wireless set.*)

BETTY (*rising*). Oh, I adore that tune.

STANTON. What is it?

BETTY. "Can't We Talk It Over."

MISS MOCKRIDGE. What?

GORDON. "Can't We Talk It Over."

(*On this ROBERT pulls back the chair that MISS MOCKRIDGE has been sitting in.*)

FREDA moves the c. table back to window.

MISS MOCKRIDGE crosses to stool at fender and FREDA offers her a chocolate which she accepts, and sits.

FREDA *stands by her, and STANTON asks MISS MOCKBRIDGE to dance. She declines.*

OLWEN *crosses to ROBERT and they dance.*

CURTAIN *descends as OLWEN and ROBERT dance.*

CURTAIN *risés again and they still dance.)*

CURTAIN.

